



THE REV.^D ARCH.^D HALL

Minister of the Presbyterian Congregation, in Wells Street Oxford Street
London Ob May 8 1778 Aet 42

4136 by
6

AN
HUMBLE ATTEMPT
TO EXHIBIT
A SCRIPTURAL VIEW
OF
THE CONSTITUTION, ORDER, DISCIPLINE,
AND FELLOWSHIP
OF THE
GOSPEL-CHURCH.

BY THE REV. ARCHIBALD HALL,
LATE PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, WELL-STREET,
OXFORD-STREET.

John v. 39. SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.

Acts xvii. 2. *And Paul, as his manner was,*—REASONED with them OUT OF
THE SCRIPTURES.

Verf. 11. *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica,* in that they
SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES daily, whether those things were so.

Second Edition.

LONDON:

Printed for T. HARDIE, No. 4, Balfover-street, Oxford-street; J. MATTHEWS,
Strand; T. CHAPMAN, Fleet-street; T. KNOTT, Lombard-street; J. OGLE,
Parliament-square, Edinburgh; and BRASH and REID, Glasgow.

MDCCXCV.



CONTENTS.

Chap.	Pag.
I. The Nature of the Gospel-church, —	4
II. The Characters of a Church-member, —	10
III. The Terms upon which Christians unite in a Church-state, — —	14
IV. The Ends that Christians should aim at, in their mutual Union, as a Church, —	17
V. The Manner of forming this Connection is by an Express, or, at least, an implied covenant,	21
VI. There is a System of Government appointed by Christ in his Church, —	26
VII. The System of Government that Christ hath appointed is but ONE, —	30
VIII. The Claim of diocesan Episcopacy examined.	31
IX. The Exercise of Church-government is committed to Elders: who are of two kinds; such as both teach and rule; and such as rule, but do not teach, —	36
X. The Qualifications, Call, and Office-duties of the Elders that labour in the Word and Doctrine,	38
XI. The scriptural Warrant for the Elder that doth only rule and govern, but doth not teach, —	52
XII. The Qualifications, Call, and Office-duties of ruling Elders, —	65
XIII. The original Constitution of the Apostolic Churches lodged all the Exercise of their Government in the Hand of these two Classes of Elders, acting unitedly, with equal Authority, in subordinate Judicatories, —	70
XIV. The Advantages of exercising Discipline on the Presbyterian Scheme, —	95
XV. The Qualifications, Call, and Office-duties of Deacons, — —	96
a 2	XVI. Of

Chap.	Pag.
XVI. Of scandalous Offences, ———	105
XVII. The MANNER of exercising the Discipline and Authority of the Church, in her judicial Proceedings, ———	110
XVIII. The doctrinal Part of excommunication :—where its Nature, Grounds, Effects, Ends, and Warrants—are explained, — — —	117
XIX. The practical Part of excommunication :—where the Manner of administering it :—the Carriage of Church-members towards one that is excommunicated ;—and the Manner and Conditions of receiving him in again—are opened, —	126
XX. The doctrinal Part of Schism.—where the Parts, Union, and Rent of the Gospel-church—are considered, — — —	133
XXI. The practical Part of Schism :—where its Circumstances, Causes, Prevention; and Cure—are represented, — — —	141
XXII. Of Separation from a Church, ———	147
XXIII. Of the Communion of Church-members :—where the Nature and Duties of this Communion are stated ;—its Obligations are proved ;—its Excellence is represented ;—Objections are answered ;—Directions concerning it are given ;—and the Cultivation of it is enforced, —	154

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE revival of Religion, of late years, in many parts of England and Wales, has filled the hearts of good men with gladness, and their lips with praise. The doctrines of the Gospel are published in their primitive purity, by Ministers of the various denominations into which the great family of Christ is divided. In many instances, the most satisfying evidence is given, that they are preached "with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven." To the external order of the Gospel-Church, however, less attention has been paid by the friends of evangelical doctrine, than the importance of the subject merits. Many put it among the things for which they care nothing. Others viewing it as unsettled

settled in the Scripture, tamely acquiesce in whatever form the ecclesiastical and civil Rulers may have assumed for the nation. It is the design of the following Treatise, to draw the attention of the Reader, to what the spirit of God, speaking in the Scripture, says on the subject. We earnestly request of all the lovers of truth, a calm and dispassionate perusal of the evidence produced. Candid men will not suffer their minds to be warped by prejudice: nor let the friends of the Gospel be disgusted at the name of Presbytery, because some men of high reputation in the philosophical world, who are denominated Presbyterians, "have brought in damnable heresies, denying" the Deity and Atonement of "the Lord that bought them, and by reason of whom, the way of truth has been evil spoken of." It will appear from the following Treatise, how happily this form of government,

government is calculated to preserve both purity of doctrine, and regularity of practice, where it is fully adopted. It is well known, however, that in most parts of England, Presbytery exists only in name: its regular subordination either unknown or not acknowledged. Nor let it be supposed that a civil establishment is necessary to give to it, full tone and energy. For, not to mention the Presbyterian Churches in North America, we know that Presbytery hath existed in its full vigour, and produced the fruits of purity and peace in the Secession Church in England, and Scotland, for more than half a century, where it has received no countenance from the state. A settled conviction of its scriptural origin, and a mind duly influenced by God's authority, are all that are necessary to carry it into effect.

Civil

Civil sanctions are bonds merely artificial, and by some, are even deemed unsuitable to the spiritual nature of the Gospel-Church.

That the republication of this Treatise may be the means of regulating, strengthening, and uniting the friends of Truth and of Order, is the earnest Prayer of the Editors,

ALEX. WAUGH.
ALEX. EASTON.

London, May 28, 1795.

PREFACE.

PREFACE.

IN the frame of our bodies, God, in his infinite wisdom, hath so ordered it that there are some parts vital, or absolutely necessary to the existence of this present life; such as, the brains, the heart, the lungs, the stomach, and bowels: other parts are equally necessary to the comfort and easy operations of life; such as, the outward skin, the eyes, the hands, and feet: and other parts are subordinately useful to these ends, and peculiarly ornamental to the body; such as, the number of our fingers and toes, our hair and nails, &c. Now, though some of these are of much greater benefit to us than others; yet they all have their use in their proper proportions, and unite to make up the perfection and beauty of the whole body. The like may be said of the revealed truths of God: though some of them are of much greater moment in themselves, and it is of much greater advantage to us, that we be acquainted with them; yet all of them are useful in their places, and every one of them helps, in some lower proportions, to make up the perfection and beauty of the Scripture.

And as our greatest regard is certainly due to such parts of the body as are most vital and necessary; yet not to the neglect of any one member

whatever. In like manner, though our highest regards should be to such parts of scripture, as most nearly concern the glory of God, our own everlasting salvation, and the good of others ; yet, not to the neglect of other parts, equally given by inspiration of God, which are to be regarded as beneficial in their proper places, and used with all due care and reverence, in subservience unto these. This our blessed Lord intimated to the Jews, when he said, ‘ Ye pay tithe of mint, anise, and cummin,’ (obligations which might be supposed to be included in the law of tithes, Lev. xxvii. 30.) ‘ and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith : these ought ye to have done, and not leave the other undone.’

When we look into the scriptures of truth, we find, the great doctrines of the gospel, that are the only channel of salvation, in which salvation is conveyed to ruined sinners, enumerated, explained, and enforced—the only acceptable method of gospel-worship stated, appointed, and recommended—the simplicity and purity of these doctrines, the life and power of this spiritual worship, secured, and rendered effectual, by the most wise and excellent institutions.

So that the whole of these sacred Books may possibly be summed up fitly enough in this one short character, The truth and the doctrine which is according to godliness, or that system which conveys grace unto sinners, directs unto duty in every

every branch of evangelical worship and obedience, and prescribes every proper method for obtaining these grand designs.

And therefore though we never pretend, that the ordinances for the government and discipline of the church are the channel of salvation to sinners, or the new and living way of approach unto God; yet still the usefulness of them is great; is manifold: while they are the stated mean of God's appointment, for preserving the original purity of doctrine and worship, for enforcing the obedience, and enlivening the devotion of saints, and for separating the precious from the vile.

And may not the necessity of observing these institutions, and of shewing a joint concern for maintaining, preserving, and transmitting them pure and uncorrupted to posterity, be strongly inferred from the scriptural representation of the nature and situation of the church itself? It is a vineyard, and therefore must be defended with this hedge, lest it be blasted with every wind, or trodden down by the foot of every beast.

The royal decree of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, relative to the service of the temple at Jerusalem, enjoined in the law given by Moses to the people of Israel, is truly praise-worthy, and a noble pattern for our imitation, while every line of it conveys a stinging reproach on the professed carelessness, lukewarmness, and unconcernedness of many Christians, for the order of service instituted by

Christ in his church, of which the Jewish temple was but a type : ‘ Whatsoever is commanded by ‘ the God of heaven,’ (said that illustrious monarch), ‘ let it be diligently done,* for the house of the God of heaven : for why should there be

* “ To obey God is virtue, and to disobey him is vice. To
 “ do or forbear therefore, because the thing to be done seems fit,
 “ or because that which is to be forborne seems otherwise, exclu-
 “ sively of a due regard had to God’s authority, however right it
 “ may be in itself thus to do or forbear, is no act of religion.
 “ There is no doubt that all God’s commands are in themselves
 “ most right and fit, being constituted upon an infinitely wise
 “ plan devised by God himself ; but then to do them solely be-
 “ cause they are so, not because he commands them, is plainly to
 “ lay aside his authority. Yet upon that God insists. He will
 “ be obeyed absolutely. He does not subject his laws to our
 “ examination in such manner, that we shall only do them, be-
 “ cause we see them right. He expects to be obeyed because he
 “ is God and King. Laying aside this measure of obedience, we
 “ subject ourselves to endless dispute and uncertainty, and, in
 “ fact, cast away that which can alone influence the conscience.
 “ God’s will is the law of his subjects ; while they have regard
 “ to that as the ground of their obligation to do and forbear,
 “ they obey ; when they depart from it, setting up another mea-
 “ sure, and searching into the reasonableness of the command to
 “ found their obligation thereupon, they assuredly fall into sin.”

Walker of Truro’s Ser. vol. I. p. 125. 126.

Accordingly all reputable, orderly, and conscientious persons, however they may differ in their opinions about particular forms, agree in this, That the prevalence of a spirit of indifference and inattention to the sovereign authority of Christ in his house, is greatly to be dreaded, and much to be lamented, as highly dishonouring to his name, “ and tending to make men lose all sense
 “ of his dominion, to leave them in all uncertainty and doubt,
 “ effectually to weaken all the bands of conscience, and set them

“ at

wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?"

There has been no maxim more frequently inculcated, or more generally assented to, than that every society of men must be agreed and united on certain conditions; must be ruled and governed by certain laws. And that some should be intrust-

"at liberty to do as they list, as their corrupted inclinations dispose them." *Ibid.*

To illustrate this, let me appeal to a serious, sensible, and touching remonstrance, I met with since writing this preface, presented to the public, by an ingenious and comprehensive writer of another denomination, against that indifference with regard to God, and his ordinances of worship, and discipline; which is every day making such a mighty progress amongst us.

"But, why do I trouble the reader about the communion of saints, in this or the other particular form? We are fallen in a day when many devoutly disclaim it. It is now very common to make light of ordinances, and even for serious persons to talk as if they valued themselves on being of no denomination of Christians; if a man, say they, loves Jesus Christ, or a preacher sets forth the mercy of the Father in him, we have no concern about his form of religion; yet they cry up the martyrs, many of whom might have saved their treasure and blood, had they made no conscience of the authority of Christ in his house. The upright will deprecate a mere name, under any form, however agreeable to the dictates of scripture; but if a man intends by his being of no denomination, that he regards not the manner of service appointed by the Lord; where is his religion! They who blame an adherence to peculiar modes, and boast in their freedom to a variety in religious service, do well to consider, that there is certainly a right way of worship, prescribed by the sole King of saints. I may innocently mistake the sense of his order, but indifference about it can be no proper evidence of my devotion to his will. Indeed if it be a matter of no importance how God is worshipped, the voluntary sufferings, exile, and ruin of innumerable per-

sons

ed with the power of applying these rules, of executing these laws, hath been also admitted without controversy. And as all things receive their virtue from divine institution, it must be matter of high concern to every church-member; who desires to keep a conscience void of offence towards God

“ sons and families, who gave ample proof of their real piety,
 “ and also of their good understanding, was the height of folly
 “ and madness; yea, and still more, the orders of the sanctuary
 “ by our Lord, and his inspired apostles, in his name, are im-
 “ pertinent, which no sober person will admit. The truth is,
 “ that to worship God in the way that he hath appointed, is an
 “ absolute duty under every dispensation. JEHOVAH alone is
 “ the object of worship, and it is his prerogative to direct the
 “ manner in which his servants shall wait upon him: this is left
 “ with Jesus, the head of the church, who, before his ascension,
 “ charged his ministers with teaching the people to observe all
 “ things whatever he hath commanded them, to the end of the
 “ world, which includes, if not principally intends, the orders
 “ of his house; so that while the world stands, his disciples are
 “ to be taught to worship in the particular way he has prescrib-
 “ ed, and no other: but how this consists with an indifference
 “ about the mode of religion, is hard to conceive. Some repre-
 “ sent the order of service as only the garb or dress of religion;
 “ be it so; it should be remembered, that there is a uniform
 “ established by the infinite wisdom of our divine Lawgiver,
 “ which belongs to the obedience of faith, and which cannot be
 “ despised, without affronting the Majesty of heaven, pouring
 “ contempt on the authority of the Son of God, and danger of
 “ superstition.

“ It is an allowed criterion of piety, that we esteem those who
 “ fear God of every name, and take pleasure in the spread of his
 “ gospel. If Christ is preached, and the power of godliness pre-
 “ vails, by whomsoever, and in whatever particu-
 “ lar form of pro-
 “ fession, his ministers and people rejoice; yet, if judicious;
 “ not so but that wherein a man appears defective, in any doc-
 “ trine

and towards man, to ask—What is the nature and constitution of the gospel-church?—What are the characters, privileges and immunities of church-members?—What are these wise and salutary laws which the King of Zion hath commanded us to observe, for maintaining comely order in his house,

“trine of the gospel, or article of instituted worship, they must
 “with him to know the way of the Lord more perfectly, and
 “consequently, rather in meekness point out his mistake, than
 “join him in his error; and, surely, my love to those who differ
 “from me in some points of Christianity, may consist with a
 “conscientious regard to every appointment of my Lord. Cha-
 “rity and truth are essential, and never to be separated. That
 “love which abounds in knowledge, and in all judgment, will
 “be sincere, inoffensive, fruitful, and abiding, and is much to
 “be desired. In a word, that notion of charity, that renders
 “the subject indifferent about any thing which he is persuaded
 “to be the will of Christ, is false and pernicious; it tends to
 “captivate the minds of men from the authority of God, and sap
 “the foundation of all true religion; it is therefore dangerous,
 “when, under any pretence, persons are taught to be uncon-
 “cerned about the appointed form of worship; it should rather
 “be commended to every one to search the scripture, and keep
 “to that which his conscience directs, and regard not the cen-
 “sures of men.

“Another thing which eclipses our glory, is this, namely, the
 “little concern of many, who have a name in the churches, to
 “understand the nature, or practise the duties of their sacred
 “covenant with one another in the Lord; hence they cleave
 “not together, but are rather averse to the unity and order
 “which are appointed, and needful to answer the purpose of
 “particular fellowship; this destroys the foundation of godly
 “discipline, from whence alone can be expected the purity and
 “mutual advantage to be hoped for in Christian society.” *Wal-*
lin's Lectures on primitive Christianity.

and

and for promoting the edification of his body?—Who are the trustees authorised, commissioned, and qualified, to see to our observing these laws?—In what manner are these trustees appointed, directed, and obliged to execute their trust?—How ought every one to behave themselves in the house of God, towards the trustees of this sacred society, and towards one another?—What is the necessity and use of maintaining that holy order, strict watch, and faithful discipline therein, which are so closely connected with the edification of the body, the purity of the faith, and the glory of Christ? To these most interesting enquiries, the following sheets are a full and satisfactory answer. At least, I will be allowed to say, the answers they give, are so clear, so consistent, so comfortable, they very much tend to establish my mind.

And as the Lord Jesus Christ hath enabled the Author to deliver and testify, not only with peculiar dignity, strength, and variety of language, but with remarkable clearness of sentiment, and meekness of temper, what the Presbyterian church of Scotland hath solemnly avowed in her Confession of Faith, and Directory, to be her received principles with regard to the true nature, order, discipline, and fellowship of the Christian church, the publication of this piece, it is hoped, will be esteemed peculiarly seasonable at this time. When many are become grossly ignorant of, others totally indifferent about, and not a few daily walking in direct contradiction to, the constitutional principles, rules, and directions

tions of that church, of which they are professed members.

Nothing can be more agreeable to every sensible and ingenuous person, than our author's candid, tender, and respectful treatment of those from whom he differs in judgment more or less widely, while at the same time his aim and endeavour is, by a coercive propriety of arguments, to persuade his readers to relinquish all such tenets as he thinks erroneous or unscriptural.

It is certainly both our duty and our happiness, to cultivate, with the most vigilant application, and unwearied assiduity, the temper of meekness, love, and candour; and indeed they are the very badge of Christianity: but I can no where find it made necessary to a Christian spirit, or to a fervent love to our brethren, and a desire of their welfare, that a man should become indifferent to any one doctrine, or ordinance, which he hath received on conviction. We may certainly love our neighbours as men, even when we cannot judge them to be saints; and we may love them as Christians, even when we think they are in many things to be blamed, and even testified against; nay, I hope, we may heartily forgive them as enemies, notwithstanding all their bitterness and rancour against us, as narrow-minded, uncharitable, &c.

A Christian's putting on charity, and wishing well to all that love the Lord Jesus Christ, is surely no way inconsistent with his holding fast at the same

time his own profession without wavering, and even contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. “ Charity and zeal (says Dr. Wother-
 “ spoon*) are so far from opposing or hindering,
 “ or even limiting each other in their exercise,
 “ that they strengthen each other in principle, and
 “ direct each other in their application. The more
 “ fervent love I have for my fellow-creatures and
 “ my fellow-Christians, it will but excite my zeal
 “ to promote their benefit, by endeavouring to
 “ convince them of any dangerous mistake, and
 “ deliver them from the dominion of every vitious
 “ practice. At the same time, this love will natu-
 “ rally produce forbearance where it is lawful and
 “ proper : because, if I love any person sincerely,
 “ I will judge of him candidly, and not impute
 “ any bad sentiment or practice to him, without
 “ necessity. It will prevent us from interfering
 “ with others where we ought not, and will urge
 “ us to activity and diligence where the case seems
 “ really to call for it.”

I shall leave it to the learned and intelligent Reader, to observe for himself, how far our Author is a master of the subject he undertakes to illustrate.

The Rev. Mess. Smith and Ferrier, were certainly in the right, to examine the profession of the church of Scotland with the closest attention, and to satisfy themselves the most fully concerning it : truth will always bear such an examination ; and

* Enquiry into the Scripture-meaning of Charity, p. 25.

we shall ever do wrong in matters of *faith* and *conscience*, to take up with notions and opinions merely upon hearsay, the credit of others, or, as it were, by a kind of *hereditary right*. This possibly may be one reason why *Christians* now a-days are generally so lukewarm in the practice of the faith they profess: they receive it from their parents, embrace it through form, examine not the evidences, and become not believers through conviction, but through the accidental circumstances of the place and times wherein they were born and live. This at least is one reason given, why the primitive Christians so much excelled us in the purity of their lives and manners; who took not up their faith, merely because their parents had done so, or because they were born in a country professing *Christianity*; but believed upon full conviction of the truth, which they had carefully examined, and lived according to the truth, which they believed, with the clear assent of head and heart. Let us learn from them, to search diligently into the grounds and evidences of our faith and profession: to follow Paul's advice—*prove all things: hold fast that which is good*: and the clear proofs we shall soon obtain of the divine warrant and authority of our profession, as Christians, and Presbyterians, and the excellency of our constitution, will make us believers upon principles firm, sure, and solid; will root, establish, strengthen, and settle us in that faith, which hath everlasting truth for its foundation, and everlasting glory for its end.

And

And after all these two pious gentlemen have said against the church of Scotland for their public standards, it may be freely submitted to their own candid and unbiassed judgment, upon review, if there be any thing in her whole system near so dogmatical, as some of their own assertions or *ipse dixits*.

It is with true satisfaction of heart I concur with my dear brother, in receiving, embracing, and propagating the doctrines displayed and inculcated in this small volume. As I think them to be truths of very great importance, and most admirably adapted to promote the glory of God, and the everlasting felicity of precious immortal souls; to revive the credit and influence of true religion; and to encourage, quicken, and improve fellowship among professed Christians in gospel-order; I cannot but wish, that they may be known, and be universally spread, especially among the people that compose the congregation of Bristow, to whose serious and particular perusal they are earnestly recommended, by him who is tied to them by all possible bands of duty, gratitude, and affection; and who shall not cease to pray, that God Almighty may give them a proper and practical use of them! and sanctify the attentive and diligent reading of them, to their, and every reader's increase in godliness, and in candour, sweetness, and self-correction! Amen.

JOHN PATISON.

Bristow-street, Edinburgh,
January 11, 1769.

To

TO THE CONGREGATION OF
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,

That assembled in Wells's-street, Oxford-street, London.

My dear Brethren,

WHATEVER share my vanity may be supposed to have in making you the patrons of this performance; I hope I can truly say, that a sincere desire to contribute to the information and establishment of your minds, in the knowledge, comfort, and practice of truth,—is my ruling motive.

It is the duty, and would be the honour, of gospel-ministers, to imitate the apostle, who determined, in his public ministrations, to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified, 1 Cor. ii. 2. The weighty truths of the gospel, in their amiable connection with, and powerful influence upon, the obedience of faith—are absolutely necessary, and of universal concern to mankind. They should be clearly opened, and warmly recommended in every place, and on every occasion; because they are the channel of salvation and comfort, and direct men to their chief end. As a *dying man*, the ambassador for Christ should, by a manifestation of these precious truths, commend himself to the conscience of his *fellow-mortals*, in the sight of God.

I cannot see the propriety of canvassing controversies in the pulpit. We know not what manner
of

of spirits we are of. The transition is short and easy, from being an eager disputer, to become a speculative preacher. "When we deal much in disputes, *says one*, we foil our souls, and endanger the temper of meekness and love, which we are so frequently enjoined to cultivate, and which are the very badge of Christianity. As for amicable disputes in religion, it is as errant cant as an amicable suit at law.—A dispute about the sacrament, as naturally removes the mind out of its state of perfect charity, as a quarrel about a whore.—The subject alters nothing; it is the temper of mind wherewith we handle these matters, that defiles the man; and it is morally impossible to meddle to any purpose, without having the mind disordered." See a letter much admired, by the ingenious Mr. Hervey, and printed among his letters.

But although you are witnesses, that I decline *public debates*, where the foundation-truths of divine revelation are not interested:—you are no strangers to my principles, relating to things of an *inferior nature*. I trust, I can honestly say, that, according to my views, I have not wilfully shunned to declare unto you, as I had an opportunity and a call, the whole counsel of God.—I plead no exemption from misapprehensions and mistakes: my highest ambition is to be an *helper* of your faith, holiness, and joy,—by directing you to the infallible oracles of God, that your faith and hope may not stand in the *wisdom of men*, however great,
good.

good, or *learned*, but *only* in the felt power and saving knowledge of the word of life, received, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

Had I designed to secure reputation, or please a multitude, you must be convinced, I have shewn very weak policy, in making an unwise choice of a SUBJECT, that is not much known in this place, either in theory or execution;—the very NAME of it is *generally*, held in contempt.

But the full conviction I have, of the *divine* right of *presbyterian church-government*, may excuse my *honest* and *charitable* zeal, in venturing to risk public censure, to support a cause, I esteem so important and interesting. All the return I ask for this labour of love, which I have undertaken, and brought to this period, with a PRINCIPAL VIEW to your edification,—is, to favour it with a careful and candid perusal; and, *may the Spirit of truth lead us into all truth*.

Zeal and charity are an *happy pair*. The half of their engaging charms are lost, if we view them *single*: nay, *they* can scarce be called *fruits of the Spirit*, but *in so far as* they run into, and characterise, one another; so that our *zeal be charitable*, and our *charity, zealous*. While we are called to be *zealously affected* in the cause of truth, we are neither allowed to *despise*, nor to *judge* our neighbours, whose views may differ from ours, in some less important things.

My labours are dedicated to your service:—
and

and, if the divine blessing shall make them *any way useful*, to promote your establishment in the truth,——their end is fully gained.

I hope, I shall always maintain a just concern for your truest and best interests, and shall endeavour in an humble dependance on divine aids, to discharge the trust committed to me, in the fear of God.——In order to this, I stand in daily need of your united fervent prayers at the throne of grace, that I may be found faithful, and that my ministry may be successful, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

And, that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom, and spiritual understanding;—and may walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God,—is, and will be the earnest prayer of,

*Your affectionate friend,
and servant in Christ,*

ARCHIBALD HALL.

Castle-street, Oxford-market,
LONDON.

HUMBLE ATTEMPT, &c.

WHEN we apply our thoughts to careful meditation on any point, it is of the greatest consequence to investigate the first principles, and obtain clear apprehensions of the rudiments of our subject. This is the foundation of science, and the ground-work of improvement. Human understanding is weak in its capacities, and conscious but of very few, and these but general, principles. We are obliged to pursue useful and interesting truth, by a slow and tedious process. We gain an object of reasonable inquiry, as we do the top of a ladder: having begun at the lowest, we make a proper use of every intermediate step. In every art and science there are some data or first principles, that found a superstructure of knowledge and practice. The sceptic, that pretends to doubt of every thing, is but a superficial, and ignorant wretch: and the positive dogmatist, that warmly supports every opinion which his credulity, inclination, and interest suggest, must infallibly blunder, and be guilty of a thousand inconsistencies. Mankind are mutual examples to one another of these ridiculous absurdities, though in very different degrees. Defect of resolution, and strength of prejudice, concur to detain the generality in chains under darkness; even where the will of God is published, and his word is professedly set up as a standard of truth and holiness, a rule of faith and manners. Hence the many contradictions among those that express an equal zeal for the word of God. How can we account for these contradictions, which are severally supported by scripture-authority, without supposing, either that the word of God is extremely dark and ambiguous, or that its professed friends approach it with a determined prepossession? Since none who has any tolerable reverence for the scriptures will pre-

sume to adopt the first, all agree to affirm the last supposition. Human pride and vanity never appear in a more ridiculous light, than when men defend their party-opinions, by human authority, or reasons that are indebted to the party defended, for all their weight and credit. The amount of a thousand such arguments is little more than this, *Sic volo, sic jubeo, stat pro ratione voluntas*. Such weapons in controversy can do very little, either to maintain a cause, or repel an insult. There are confessed principles of Christianity, which are allowed to hold the place of foundation-truths, in the most important system of our holy religion; and the more easily and clearly we are able to trace the connection of every article of our faith with these leading truths, the more fully we shall satisfy ourselves, and persuade others, that our doctrine is sound, and our belief founded on good evidence.

The general principles of human knowledge are, either some maxims, that carry conviction on the first proposing of them; or the declarations of the holy scriptures in matters that are wholly supernatural, and depend only upon a divine revelation.

Whatever concerns the constitution, order, discipline, and fellowship of the church, is only to be learned from the word of God: because she is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, Eph. ii. 20. 'This is the law of God's house; the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy: behold, this is the law of the house,' Ezek. xliii. 12. 'See,' said the Lord to Moses, 'that thou make all things pertaining to the tabernacle, according to the pattern which was shewed thee in the mount,' Heb. viii. 5. 'And unto John was given a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein,' Rev. xi. 1. This reed is a proper emblem of the holy scripture: this is the rule by which all persons, doctrines, and practices, are to be tried. With this rule the apostle is commanded to take the just dimensions of the true gospel-church, which is now the temple of God, and his habitation through the Spirit. These that prophecy, must prophecy according to the proportion of

faith : and these that take the dimensions of the gospel-church, must walk exactly by the rule of revealed truth. She is built, not upon the persons, but upon the doctrine, of the apostles and prophets, who bear an uniform testimony concerning Jesus Christ, who is the chief corner-stone, which not only sustains, but unites the building, and gives strength, solidity, and beauty, to the whole spiritual edifice which is erected upon him.

This is a good apology for bringing every received opinion about the Christian church to the light of the word, and examining its foundation and warrant there. This is the sure word of prophecy, unto which, in distinction from, and in opposition to, every other rule, we do well to take heed. I revere these writers, who have worthily laboured in the important argument ; but it would be an unpardonable crime, even in the opinion of these candid inquirers, to rest my belief on their authority and reasoning, which is no more than a means of holding forth the *word of faith*, as the last and highest reason of believing. In the progress of this treatise, all I aim at, is, to explain the reasons of the hope that is in me, so far as it relates to this subject. I would be understood to make this attempt, without intending to despise or reproach any who think otherwise, on a point which has been taken up in so many different lights, by men who deservedly hold the first rank in general esteem, for good sense, penetration, accuracy, and caution. I am sensible how much my weakness stands in need of indulgence : and I ask it the more earnestly, because the reader is desired not to rest his faith upon my reasoning, but upon the testimony of the Holy Ghost speaking in the scriptures ; and where this testimony is not truly stated, or fairly represented, the injury to the reader is infinitely less, than the dishonour to God, whose truth is changed into a lie. May this awful consideration make an abiding, deep, and powerful impression on my heart ! May the Spirit, that searcheth the deep things of God, lead my way, assist my apprehensions, and guide me into all truth !

The whole makes but one continued discourse ; but to avoid all obscurity, I shall digest what I have to say, into so many chapters.

C H A P. I.

The Nature of the Gospel-Church.

THE ingenious and candid Mr. Muir has well observed*, that "in the New Testament, there are very different acceptations of the term *church*.

"Sometimes, it signifies no more than a concourse of people, assembled in a lawless, and employed in a sinful, manner. Such was the mob raised by Demetrius the silver-smith, against Paul; whereof it is said, that 'the assembly,' or, as it is in the first language, 'the church was confused,' Acts xix. 32.

"Sometimes, it signifies a meeting for the discussion of civil affairs, according to the particular usages of different countries. Such a meeting the town-clerk at Ephesus had in view, when, to the mob now mentioned, he said, 'It shall be determined in a lawful assembly, or, 'church,' Acts xix. 39.

"There is one instance, where it points out at church-officers alone, Matth. xxviii. 17. in their ruling capacity; and of the church, in that view, it is said, 'Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven,' Matth. xxviii. 18.

"Now, it signifies a company of persons professing the faith, and walking together in the love of the gospel. Such were certain societies in Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, and other places; for, referring to them, the historian tells us, that Paul and Barnabas 'ordained elders in every church,' Acts xiv. 23.

"And,

"Then, it signifies such a company of believers, with proper officers set over them in the Lord, for all the purposes of doctrine and worship, discipline and government, appointed by Jesus Christ. Thus the historian understood *this term*, saying, "There was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem,' Acts viii. 1,"

The word [*Εκκλησια*], commonly used to signify *the church* in the New Testament, was anciently used among the Greeks, to denote an assembly of the people called out by public proclama-

* See his synod sermon, on Acts xv. 31. p. 5, 6.

tion, and gathered into one particular place, that they might consult about their common concerns. A practice which prevailed in their commonwealths, which were ruled by popular government. Even in these assemblies, reason dictated the expediency, and shewed the necessity of establishing rules for their convention and conduct; without which their assembling must soon have produced the worst effects, but could not answer a good purpose. Accordingly in every state there were [*πρυτανεις*] magistrates and appointed rulers, who convened the people. When they assembled without their authority, it was reckoned a seditious mob, or riotous meeting. *Vide Archæol. Attic. p. 101, 102.* An example of this irregularity and faction is recorded in the history of the Acts of the apostles, chap. xix. where we find the city of Ephesus filled with tumult and confusion. The lawless rabble that rose on that occasion is called [*ἡ ἐκκλησία συγκαχυσμένη*] a confused assembly, *vers. 32*; and [*ῥασις*], an uproar or sedition, *vers. 40.* And again, [*συστροφή*], a concourse, in the same verse. These meetings were illegal in their nature, and dangerous in their consequences: therefore the town-clerk told the rude mob, that all their matters should be determined [*ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἑνωμένων*], in a lawful assembly, *vers. 39.* Beza's note on the place is, "Cæterum [*ἰνομος ἐκκλησία*], id est, legitima concis non tantum op-
"ponitur [*τῇ συσσει*], id est, seditiosæ & tumultuosæ concioni,
"sed etiam [*τῇ συγκαλήτῳ*], id est, ei concioni, quæ extraordinem
"advocabatur." A lawful assembly is not only opposed to a seditious and riotous meeting, but even to that which is extraordinarily convened.

The seventy Greek interpreters have rendered *ἐκκλησία*, which our translators render congregation, by this word [*Ἐκκλησία*]. It denotes that society of the children of Israel, which was called together out of all the land of Judea, unto one place, on stated occasions, to keep their solemn feasts, and to observe the public and remarkable rites of their religion. Witius, in *Symb. Apost. exerc. 24. sect. 4.* accounts for the common use of the word [*Ἐκκλησία*] to describe the church, in the following manner: "[*Ἐκκλησία*] autem appellatio Christo, &c. that is, Christ and his
"apostles were pleased to call the assembly of believers [*Ἐκκλησία*]
"a church

“*a church*, rather than any thing else; both because the meaning of the word was extremely proper to the thing; and because it put a necessary distinction between Christians and the Jews, who usually called themselves the *synagogue*; and finally, that they might suit their way of speaking to the Gentiles, that were, in time coming, to constitute the far greater part of the people of God. The word *synagogue* was but seldom used among the Greeks; but the word [*Ἐκκλησία*] was very well known, and has something agreeable and engaging in the first ideas which it suggests: for it signifies a promiscuous multitude of men of every station in life, yet not a rude irregular mob, but such an assembly from which none are excluded for the lowliness of his birth, or the meanness of his circumstances. The apostle speaks to this purpose, 1 Cor. i. 26. ‘Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world,’ &c.”

The sense in which the word was originally used among the Greeks, seems to be retained in the New Testament; only it is applied in a suitableness to the Christian character, and the authority, manner, and purpose of their calling. In general it may be described to this purpose, The church is a society of believing and holy persons, whom God hath called, by the gospel, out of all mankind, to the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ.

The following remarks may be profitable to open the sense, propriety, and emphasis of this description.

1. The church is a *society*: it consists of *many* members, 1 Cor. xii. 12. ‘As the body—hath *many members*; so also is Christ,’ Chap. x. 17. ‘We being *many*.’ All these members are joined together, and constitute a society, for ‘we being many, are one body:’ and being a society, the church is, not without law to God, but under law to Christ, and under special obligations to serve one another in love.

2. The church is a society of *men*. We confine the idea to them, in that particular light, we now speak of it. It is true, angels are our fellow-servants; they serve our common Lord,
and

and are children of the same family, and partakers of the same felicity, which consists in the enjoyment of God; hence we are said to come to an innumerable company of angels: but their relation to Christ is not of the same kind with the church's relation to him, neither does it stand on the same foundation. They are not redeemed by his blood, nor called by his gospel, nor renewed by his Spirit, nor partakers of his covenant. These are the great and peculiar privileges of the church of the first-born.

3. The church is a society of *believers*; that is, of persons who have received, with an hearty assent, upon a full conviction, the word of the gospel, as a faithful report, and worthy of all acceptance. The primitive church was a society of this kind of persons, Acts ii. 41. 'They that gladly received the word, were baptized, and were added to the church.' Heb. iii. 6. 'We are Christ's house, if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.'

4. The church is a society of *holy persons*: hence called an holy nation, and a kingdom of saints. The church, which is the kingdom of Christ, is not of this world, which lieth in wickedness: they are called to be saints.

5. The church of the living God is gathered, supported, and advanced, by his power and favour. It is God that calleth her.

6. The church is gathered by means of the gospel. That very general invitation which God addresses unto men, by the works of nature, is not sufficient to form a church. The word of divine revelation must accomplish that glorious end. 1 Cor. i. 21. 'After that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.'

7. By the gospel men are called to the *fellowship of the Son of God*, in the privileges and comforts of his mediation, and to an universal submission to him in every part of his revealed character and will.

8. The church is a society called out of all mankind. How great the honour! how absolutely free the favour! worthy indeed to be had in everlasting remembrance! The church is chosen, redeemed, and called out of the world; not because of
their

their works, but because of their God who calleth them: therefore they act in character, when they are not conformed to the world; are crucified to it in point of affection, hope, and dependence; look not at things that are seen, which are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, which are eternal; have their conversation in heaven, where their blessed Head is; and take all the measures of their conduct from the unerring rule of his word, receiving the law at the mouth of the Lord of hosts.

That our apprehensions of the nature of the gospel-church may be more clear and accurate, I might observe, that she is an holy—spiritual—independent—regular—and visible society.

The church is an holy society. She is separated from the world which is common and unclean: her faith is most holy: her manner and proceedings should bear the same genuine marks of holiness, while she is purified in obeying the truth through the Spirit. 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Inward purity is the real, and outward holiness the seen badge and characteristic of every member: without both no man shall see the Lord; and without the last no man ought to be reputed a member of the church, whose daily duty is to name the name of Jesus, and whose daily endeavour should be to depart from all iniquity: Her walls are *salvation* from defiling pollutions, as well as from calamitous afflictions, and threatening dangers.

The church is a spiritual society. She is built up an habitation of God through the Spirit: her ordinances and services are spiritual. This spirituality constitutes a grand and lasting distinction between the New Testament church, and the church-state of the Jews, whose ordinances were beggarly, and their worship carnal and shadowy. Real Christians are spiritual persons; they eat spiritual meat; they drink spiritual drink; they are blessed with spiritual blessings; they are filled with spiritual understanding; and they are built up a spiritual house: and all the members of the church of the living God must be in appearance, what these blessed persons really are.

The church is independent of all the wisdom, authority, and policy of any created head. The Lord is her Judge, the Lord is

her

her King, the Lord is her Lawgiver. Ambition is aspiring. To curb it among the apostles, our blessed Lord gave them this particular and express charge: 'Be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren: call no man your father upon earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven: neither be ye called master; for one is your Master, even Christ,' Matth. xxiii. 8, 9, 10. The church is not composed of members which serve divers lusts and pleasures: her model is not submitted to the caprice and humours of men: the Son has made this holy nation free, and therefore they are free indeed, and should not be the servants of men in any thing which belongs to the law of their God, any more than the servants of sin; because, it being impossible to serve God and mammon, Christ and Belial, they cannot be the former, without being the latter also. The connection of a church with the state is accidental, rather than any way necessary to her constitution and management. Her alone dependance is on her glorious Head, and on the word of his grace, which declares *his favour* to her, and *her duty* to him.

The church is a regular and orderly society. She is not like the chaos—*rudis indigestaque moles*, a rude, undigested mass; without form and void: she has a most comely form, and most exact and beautiful proportions. She is not a disorderly, confused mob; but a lawful, well-ordered society. Like the earthly Jerusalem, which was a figure of the gospel-church, she is built as a city, that is compact together; and it is one of her laws, that all things be done decently, and in order. And finally,

The church is a visible society, as she is united to Christ, and enjoys communion with him, in grace and glory. Her greatest beauty is indeed inward and unseen. Every member of the church of the first-born is called by the grace of God, who is pleased to reveal his Son in him; his faith is unfeigned; his holiness is real, powerful, and evangelical; his circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit, and not in the letter; and his praise is not of men, but of God. This is his true character, and his greatest honour. But how shall the world know, that they are the disciples of Christ? how shall wisdom be justified of her children? or, how shall they satisfy themselves, that *by the grace of God they really are*

what they are? The answer is plain: 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' Matth. vii. 16. 20. The man in whom Christ is savingly revealed, consults not with flesh and blood: where faith is without dissimulation, it worketh by love: he who is begotten to a lively hope, purifieth himself: true and prevailing love to God, keepeth his commandments; a pure heart is manifested in an holy conversation: and the power is always attended with the form of godliness. These being the genuine and inseparable fruits of vital union to Jesus Christ by his blessed Spirit, and communion with him, without which we cannot distinguish Christ's sheep from the men of the world, they must shew their character, and *demonstrate* their connections, by those evidences, which necessarily belong to their happy state, as members of the body of Christ. Hence even the children of God are a visible church in the world, and while they are sealed in their foreheads and right-hands, all men know whose they are, and whom they serve.

C H A P. II.

The Characters of a Church-Member.

THERE is only one grand distribution of mankind, and that is into two classes, *the world, and these that are chosen out of the world.* The world is a very comprehensive general, and includes all that lie in wickedness, and remain strangers to that new state of life, favour, and blessedness, which is in Jesus Christ. Out of this most deplorable state of alienation from the life of God, an innumerable company are chosen, redeemed, and called, to be witnesses for God, partakers of Christ, and heirs of glory. These constitute the general assembly and church of the first-born, whom a divinely sovereign and gracious God hath taken, with evident marks of distinguished honour, to be his church and peculiar people.

This church is every where represented as standing in most endearing relations to her blessed Head; and the grandest ideas of her nature and excellency are conveyed by these ennobling, enriching, and unfading relations: hence called his bride, his body, his fulness, &c. These, in their highest idea, constitute the character of the *church of the first-born*: and we require

no more to constitute visible church-members, and we can desire no less, than what, in judgment of charity, is consistent with *this union*, which is between Christ and the church. So much of the *form*, as may give satisfying evidence of the power of godliness. So much of the *effect*, as may give reason, in charity, to believe the existence and prevalence of the *cause*. Regeneration is stated to our view, in many places, as the leading step to communion with Christ, and the privileges of his mystical body, John iii. 3. 5. and i. 12, 13, &c. Baptism is the outward sign and seal of this heavenly privilege, Tit. iii. 5. and is accordingly the first step toward actual membership in the visible church, Acts ii. 38. as circumcision was to the covenant-seed of Abraham. And as the covenant-grant which was the foundation of circumcising his infant-seed, recorded Gen. xvii. 7. is evidently extended to the New-Testament church, as an encouragement to baptism, and the warrant for it Acts ii. 38. 39. it is highly credible, that baptism has the same place in the Christian dispensation, as circumcision had in the Jewish. This point needs no process of reasoning to deduce its authority from the oracles of truth, being obviously founded in Col. ii. 8—13. This supposed; infant-baptism, a sign and seal of their church-membership, is confessedly a just and necessary consequence. Wherefore those that are, in the appointed order, partakers of baptism, are vested with all the external rights and privileges, which can belong to them that are truly regenerate, in the same circumstances; until, in advancing years, their neglect or contempt of those duties, on the performance whereof the continued evidence and proof of visible regeneration rest, shall demonstrate the badness of their heart and state. To them we may apply, with necessary alterations, these words, Rom. ii. 25. 'Baptism verily profiteth, if thou observe all things Christ hath commanded: but if thou slightest his words, thy baptism is made no baptism, in the sight of God,' as to real communications of grace, and acceptance with him; and is therefore made no baptism in the sight of the church, as to a participation of the external rights and privileges of a regenerate state. Regeneration is of that mysterious nature, that it is discerned in the internal and real existence of it, by him only who searcheth the heart: its evidences and

fruits in their external demonstrations are all of which the church can judge; and the admission of church-members to enjoy privileges, belonging, in their nature, use, and design, to the regenerate only, must be regulated by these appearances, which the Holy Ghost tells us, usually characterise a true Christian, to the view of the world.

The appearances of Christianity, which characterise the new creature, in whom old things are passed away, and all things become new, are neither dark nor doubtful. These appearances are necessary to enable men, who must judge of things by looking on the outward appearance, to form an estimate of themselves and others; but cannot in any respect assist the Deity, whose judgment is always according to truth. He seeth not as man seeth; but looketh on the heart, 1 Sam. xvi. 7. He knoweth what is in man, and needeth not to be told by any outward discovery; for he searcheth the heart. We, poor limited mortals, must judge of things by the seeing of the eye, and the hearing of the ear. It is not our province, to search the heart; this is the prerogative of him who made the heart, to understand the secrets of it; and under every specious shew, discern truth, with infallible certainty. What we are concerned in is, to enquire what qualifications the scripture requires to clear our title and right of admission to, or continuance in, the fellowship of the saints. And,

1. Those who manifest prevailing inclinations to any sin, of any kind, and walk accordingly, against light and conviction, shall not inherit the kingdom of God, 1 Cor. vi. 9. 10. 11.

2. Those who have escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust, by the knowledge of the truth, have professedly given up themselves to the Lord, and joined themselves to his people in church-order; but have returned again with the dog to his vomit, and with the swine that had been washed to wallow in the mire, who harden themselves against warnings, admonitions, reproofs, and counsels, which have been administered with a Christian temper, and in the due order, Matth. xviii. 16. 17. 18. so that they neglect to hear the church in the judicial exercise of her authority, in a plain case of sin or error;—those who act thus must be reputed by the church, as Heathen men, and aliens from the common-wealth of Israel.

3. Believers, who receive the knowledge of the truth, and profess to esteem and love it, may, and none else ought, to be admitted into church-fellowship. This is a *sacred*, and should be a *settled maxim* among Christians. Accordingly the apostles baptized, and united in holy communion, these that gladly received the gospel; even as Abraham received circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith, which he had yet being uncircumcised. The apostle writes to the church of Ephesus, as consisting of *οι πιστοι* believers, or faithful persons, Eph. i. 1. His meaning was very well understood. How frequently do we find faith connected with salvation; and the want of it as often joined with damnation! Can we think, that the scripture speaketh to this purpose, in vain? Because the truth is important, and should be kept in our memories, line is laid upon line. Every adult member of the gospel-church should have the same appearances of faith which Simon Magus had, Acts viii. 12. a faith not contradicted, but perfected, by works, and rendered visible in its fruits, James ii. 14—26. Such believers only ought to be received, or retained, in the communion of saints.

4. Such as hold this faith, must make an open profession of the subjection of their consciences to the authority of Christ in the gospel, and of their hearty readiness to yield obedience to all his institutions. This profession supposes a *competent knowledge* of the doctrines of the gospel; and it implies a denying of their own wisdom and choice, where the wisdom and authority of Zion's Lawgiver interpose, together with a *declared resolution* to perform all known duties of religion, and to abstain carefully from every known sin, Rom. x. 9. 12.

This is a short draught of the *appearances* of vital union to the Lord Jesus, which are specified on by the Holy Ghost, as *essentially necessary*, in these who may warrantably be allowed to commence or maintain fellowship in a church-state, with an humble confident dependence on Christ for an effectual blessing on their connections.

It appears from the whole, that hypocrites, who have assumed and never laid aside a mask, must be reputed members of the church, so long as they continue to use that mask, without denying

ing by their works what they profess in words. The reason is plain; they wear the *appearance* of saints and faithful persons; and that they have *no more* than the appearance, is known to God and themselves *only*. Men can judge of men, by appearance only; yet this we may add on the best authority, that God who searcheth the heart, will cause fearfulness to seize the hypocrites in Zion, and this they shall assuredly have at his hand, they shall lie down in sorrow, and be covered with confusion.

But this is the province of an all-seeing, just, and jealous God; and what are blind, deceiving and deceived men, that they should presume to intrude into those things which they have not seen? *Secret* things belong to the Lord our God alone: but the things which are *revealed* belong to us and our children. Let us learn not to exceed our line, in judging of what was never competent to any created intelligence, being the prerogative of JEHOVAH.

C H A P. III.

The Terms upon which Christians unite in a Church-state.

HAVING seen who are church-members, according to the scripture-rule, which is our alone infallible guide in every thing which concerns her nature, constitution, and order; it is proper in the next place to enquire, How these members, considered as so many individuals, become a church? how are they formed into a church-state, as a society, to enjoy the comfort and advantages, and to perform the duties, of brethren in unity? In general, this must be, *by mutual solemn agreement*. A voluntary society cannot be formed by any other means. That the church is a *voluntary* association is clear, Psal. cx. 3. And that she was formed in this manner, at her erection, by the ministry of the prophets and apostles, is undeniable. Conviction of the truth in them who gladly received the word, was the first step towards a church-connection. Upon this conviction they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then to one another by the will of God; and being thus formed, others were added unto the church. The terms of their confederation at first were not numerous. In all civil empires, laws have been added because
of

of transgressions; and new crimes have been the occasion of enlarging their statutes. Something of this kind we see in the scripture itself. Particular circumstances have generally been the occasion of penning additional parts of the book of God. If we account satisfactorily for the institution of sundry laws, and the explanation and vindication of several doctrines and duties, of divine revelation, particular incidents must be attended to. This was the case in the first erection of the Christian church. At one time we find this one article singled out instead of the whole, 'That Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God,' Matth. xvi. 16. Acts viii. 37. At another time, several other things are superadded, Acts xv. 28. 29. Whether we suppose some only, or all, or any of these things to be of continuing obligation, it makes no difference to my purpose. New opinions and new practices occasioned the exhibition of revealed truth in a necessary contrast; and so the truth or duty, for the present denied and opposed, suggested a new article in the *list, upon which Christians must mutually agree*. But here due caution must be used, lest an overbearing temper should so enlarge the formula, that groundless despising or judging of brethren become, humanly speaking, unavoidable. The consequences of imposing such a formula much be visibly pernicious to social welfare. Therefore nothing ought to have a place in these conditions, but what can plead first its warrant in the word of God, then its great weight and importance in the Christian scheme; and finally, its obvious utility and necessity to promote righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. So attested, we dare not refuse any article a place in the terms of church-communion; but a defect in any of these points will be improved as a good pretence for its exclusion from a station so important and interesting. Our rule on this head is fixed and determined, Rom. xiv. 1. 'Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.' Four things must concur in fixing the articles of communion in a church, *viz.* the sanction of truth, peace, holiness, and order. *Unanimity* must be insisted on, as an assential circumstance, because a dissenting voice throws all in confusion.

1. Truth must subscribe the articles, otherwise they are null
and

and void to all intents and purposes: 'for we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. Charity, which is the bond of perfectness, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. He that abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.'

2. Peace must join her hearty assent, in order to render them valid, Rom. xiv. 19. 'Follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another;' with the two foregoing verses.

3. Holiness must unite her sanction, otherwise all is to no purpose, Heb. xii. 14. 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.' Holiness becomes the house of God for ever. Rob it of this valuable ornament, and you leave nothing to characterise it, which carries a visible proof of the purpose of God, of the purchase of Christ, or of the operations of the blessed Spirit.

4. Order must recognise the whole. Without this they can exhibit no comeliness of form, and effectually answer no valuable end. 'God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints,' 1 Cor. xiv. 33. Answerable to this, he commands, that 'all things be done decently, and in order,' vers. 40.

These four able counsellors being agreed to recommend a position, as an article of church-fellowship, deserve implicit regard, as soon as we are fully certified of their concurrence, and the genuineness of their recommendation. To oppose, would prove one *obstinate and perverse*, after such a conviction, but to submit without gainsaying on this evidence, can never convict him of simplicity or credulity.

As I dread no opposition to those general ideas, being so evidently scripture-maxims, I shall only add, that church-union is commenced by an obediential act of believers, jointly giving up themselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ, to do and observe all his commands, under a persuasion of the promise of his special presence; and mutually agreeing, jointly to perform all the duties which in that connected state are required of them.

C H A P. IV.

The Ends to be aimed at in the mutual Union of Christians, upon proper Terms in a Church-State.

THE ends to be attained by this union, are of the greatest consequence for promoting vital religion. That this is the case will be set in a true light, by stating, in one connected view, the real designs of this holy communion. In general, it is intended to maintain and exhibit,—soundness in the faith,—simplicity of gospel-worship,—impartial exercise of discipline,—and purity of conversation becoming the gospel of Christ. On each of these particulars, a few words will suffice.

1. One valuable end to be obtained in church-fellowship, is the maintaining and exhibiting of a system of sound principles. The frequently repeated solemn directions, referring to this head, at once remind us of our faulty and criminal inattention, and urge upon the mind a serious regard to its real importance, 2. Tim. i. 13. 'Hold fast the form of sound words.' 1. Tim. vi. 3. 4. 'If any man teach otherwise, and *consent not* to whole-
' some words, even the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to
' the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud,
' knowing nothing.' 2 Tim. iii. 14. 'Continue thou in the
' things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, know-
' ing of whom thou hast learned them.' This is a duty incumbent on every individual Christian according to his station and place; and therefore must also bind upon them in united fellowship. Hence we find *churches* commended, Rom. vi. 17. 1 Cor. i. 5. 6. Eph. iv. 21. Col. ii. 2. Rev. ii. 13. and iii. 10.; or blamed, Gal. i. 6. Rev. ii. 14. 15. 20. and iii. 2. 3. 15. 16. according to the aboundings or defects of their zeal upon this head. It is a maxim founded in reason, that 'two are better than one;' and it cannot be reasonably denied, that society is of considerable use to open the mind to the discoveries of truth, to quicken and govern a regular zeal, and to fortify against the deceitful appearances under which error, too often with fatal success, makes its first advances. As truth is the basis and uniting cement of this holy

D

communion

communion, so the maintaining and exhibiting of its purity and influence should be the object of their union, that all may speak the truth in love. Where things are otherwise, the association will be for the worse, and not for the better, Rev. xxii. 18. 19.

2. Simplicity of gospel-worship is another momentous object of Christians associating themselves in a church-state. To worship the Deity is a dictate of the natural conscience, which carries the same evidence and force as the conviction of his being and perfections: but the manner of worshipping him with acceptable service must be learned wholly from his word. When men have been left to bare reason, without supernatural aids, they have had very obscure notions of the one supreme God, and in worshipping him have run into things really inconsistent with the belief of the one supreme Being, though at the same time they were forced to own there was such a Being. But, blessed be the Lord who has made the light of his word to arise upon us, and has not left us at any uncertainty about the object, mediator, or institutions of divine worship. Through Christ we have access by one Spirit unto the Father. As man is considered in different lights, he is under different obligations, as an individual, a member of a family, or a subject in a commonwealth: the same is the case with a Christian, whose obligations are indispensable to worship God through Christ in his closet, in his family, and in the sanctuary; or, in secret, in private, and in public. None of these services, on proper occasions, must be omitted. The scripture is frequent, full, and expresses on the duties and obligations of public worship, on the heads of reading the word, praising, praying, preaching, contributing to the relief of the poor, administering and receiving the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper; duties of very great consequence to us! Christ having graciously promised his effectual blessing on them, every circumstance in this service should be managed with the utmost simplicity, and in nearest conformity to the appointments of Heaven; God will bless nothing but his own institutions. The inventions of men, in serving God, are as unprofitable, as they are wicked and presumptuous, Deut. xii. 31, 32.

3. The impartial exercise of discipline is a third grand object of church-

church-fellowship. That society labours under an essential defect in its constitution, which makes no effectual provision for the protection and comfort of regular, useful members; and for the suppression and discouragement of these, who, in speculation or practice, weaken the foundations, injure the interests, or oppose the designs, of its erection. Such a social connection, where life and civil property are at stake, would be exceedingly contemptible and absurd, and the consequences most shocking and pernicious, and without an effectual plan of order and discipline duly executed, I cannot imagine how the case could be better in the church, which is a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people. That every unworthy sentiment and practice may receive a suitable recompence of reward, so far as is competent to men by divine appointments, church-members joined in holy fellowship must watch over one another, with a passionate ardour of unfeigned care for their mutual welfare and good behaviour, Heb. xii. 15.—must daily exhort, comfort, and animate to duty, Heb. x. 24, 25.—must admonish an offending brother, who has departed from his duty, and restore him in the spirit of meekness, Gal. vi. 1.—must rebuke, exhort, and if these means do not reach the end, must, after all long-suffering, reject the incorrigible and obstinate, 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25, 26. and iv. 2. Tit. iii. 10. The same reasons which support our plea, for the purity of the church, at her original constitution, infer with equal force and evidence, the necessity of maintaining her order and purity to the last, and by just consequence, the necessity of exercising discipline with impartial zeal: for offences must come, and therefore the old leaven of error, malice, and wickedness must be purged out, that the church may be a new, holy lump, 1 Cor. v. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. *N. B.* This passage is remarkably to the purpose. Every thing which carries the appearance of partiality in the exercise of discipline, is equally inconsistent with the dictates of reason, and the express letter of revelation, 1 Tim. v. 21. Jam. iii. 17. Our God is no respecter of persons, and his law obliges us to shew no preference on worldly considerations in that society which is chosen out of the world, Jam. ii. 1.—10. Discipline must therefore be impartial, or else it can never be faithful and useful.

4. I observed, that purity of conversation is a grand scope of all associations and managements in church-communion. All that has been already mentioned on the ends of this spiritual fellowship, is as much subservient to this object, as the use of the lower steps of a ladder for enabling a man to gain the highest. I use the term *conversation*, in the same large and unconfined sense in which it is to be taken Phil. i. 27. and 2 Pet. iii. 11. In these passages I conceive it means, the bias, temper, and disposition of the mind, with the whole course of life and behaviour. To preserve and promote the purity of these is a very noble object. This is man's true honour, and deserves to be pursued with the most vigorous resolution. In its highest perfection, which is attained in the heavenly state only, this conversation shines with dazzling brightness, without any eccentric revolutions, or irregular and uneven motions: but something of it in all those, who shall see and enjoy God, must be found, before they go hence, and be no more in this world, Heb. xii. 14. Religious fellowship is an excellent means to restore, stablish, strengthen, and settle this conversation, which glorifies our Father which is in heaven, which adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour, and which convinces gainsayers, and comforts the godly. The amiable and exalted characters of this conversation, are enough to induce a mind moderately curious, to inquire what it is, and how it may be attained. To instance in a few particulars, it is called, an *upright conversation*, a *conversation ordered aright*; a *good conversation*; an *holy conversation*; a *conversation in heaven*, &c. These recommendations are sufficiently justified by the excellency of its nature, as described in several passages of holy writ, Micah vi. 8. 2 Cor. vii. 1. Phil. i. 27. Tit. ii. 11.—14. and iii. 8. Texts of that clearness, importance, and fulness of meaning, that the bare reading of them may convince us, that the conversation we speak of, takes in all duties of piety in reference to God, of righteousness towards our neighbour, and of temperance and moderation, sobriety and conduct, relative to ourselves. 'As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the face of a man his friend.' To prove that man is a social being, we need only to appeal to facts which demonstrate self-insufficiency, the felt necessity of a foreign dependence,

dependence, and the many thousand advantages, which, by cultivating society with our fellow men, crowd in from every quarter to deceive our pains, to alleviate our sorrows, and to heighten our joys. The same arguments acquire a new force and weight, when applied to Christians, who are not of the world, whose strength lies in their union, and who are so particularly described from the agency of their mutual love in the discharge of relative characteristic duties, as is clearly stated in John xiv. xv. and xvii. chapters.

CHAP V.

The Manner of forming a Church-connection, is by an express, or, at least, an implied, Covenant.

TO attain these blessed and important ends of church-fellowship, the agreement of the members in that connection must be solid and deliberate. Rational confidence in our fellow-creatures arises from our knowledge of them, and the nature of the obligation which they are under. Distrust and jealousy are to be prevented or removed by the use of means adapted in their nature to persuade men that we and they are unanimous in sentiment, aim, and design. The effectual means of gaining this end are common to men and Christians. Reason demands satisfaction in a manner suited to the circumstances of the case. In some instances, a general assent will answer the same end; which in others cannot be answered, by any means inferior to a solemn appeal to the dread tribunal of Jehovah. Nor is it to be interpreted a *taking of God's name in vain*, when men by a *solemn oath* put an end to strife, found mutual confidence, or impress a conviction of truth and duty on their own consciences. We may say of this, as our Lord says of the sabbath, it is made, appointed, and enjoined, for man. Mutual agreement must be the ground of fellowship in a church-state, for 'how shall two walk together, except they are agreed?' and how shall two know that they are agreed, except their agreement be somehow expressed in a manner which may remove just cause of suspicion? There are many unanswerable evidences and proofs of mutual agreement

agreement or confederation of Christians to walk together in the faith and order of the gospel, either in a more explicit, or in a more general way, being the course taken to form churches in primitive times, and a proper course at all times. I apprehend Dr. Owen, [*True Nature of a Gospel-Church*, p. 27.] lays down an assertion he was easily able to support, when he says, "The constitution of such a society as a church is, intrusted with powers and privileges by a *covenant* or mutual consent, with an engagement unto the performance of the duties belonging unto it, hath its foundation in the light of nature, so far as it hath any thing in common with other voluntary relations and societies; was instituted by God himself, as the way and means of erecting *the church-state* of the Old Testament, and consisteth in the performance of such duties as are expressly required of all believers." It will be very difficult, not to say, impossible, to give a tolerable account of many things spoken of the church, without allowing this; but on this supposition nothing is more easy. A few instances will serve for a specimen,

1. The visible church is described sometimes by allusion to a natural body, Rom. xii. 4, 5.; to a house, Eph. ii. 21, 22.; to a city, Heb. xii. 22.; to a kingdom, Col. i. 13.; and other things which hold forth such an explicit union of the members of the Christian church to one another, as well as of the whole to her blessed Head, as resembles the union of the members in the human body, of the stones in a building, of freemen in a corporation, and of subjects in a commonwealth. But how can we conceive a voluntary relation, so strict and intimate, without a confederation?

2. The expressions of Scripture, *joining* to the Lord, 1 Cor. vi. 17. and *adding* to the church, Acts ii. 47. and v. 13, 14. carry an idea of mutual agreement and covenanting; first believers are added to the Lord, and then joined together, that they may stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, Phil. i. 27.

3. I would not be thought to stretch an argument from the Old to the New-Testament church, farther than the nature and scope of the argument will fairly bear; but the *voluntariness* and
intimacy

intimacy of the relation of members in New-Testament churches, is asserted in the most express terms in several passages of the Old Testament, as *Is. lvi. 6.* compared with *chap. lxii. 5.* 'As a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee (the church).' It is hard to conceive how this can be, except by confederate agreement.

4. No person is a subject of church-government, except he be within her communion; for 'what have they to do to judge them also that are without? do not they judge them that are within?' But how do they enter into the church, and on what terms do they continue? Surely by joining and drawing in an equal yoke with their brethren; renouncing fellowship with unrighteousness; communion with darkness; concord with Belial; part with an Infidel; and agreement with idols; and cultivating fellowship with righteousness; communion with light; concord with Christ; partnership with believers; and agreement with the temple of God, *2 Cor. vi. 14. 15. 16.* Compare this with *Matth. xi. 29.* and it will fully prove all that I assert about the federal agreement of believers in church-fellowship.

5. This covenant-agreement must be the ground of such an intimate and useful fellowship, as that which subsists in the visible church is every where represented to be. See that well-known text, *Eph. iv. 1.—16.* a passage so decisively clear, that it supercedes the necessity or use of any comment, to demonstrate its propriety and emphasis, as applied to the business in hand.

6. The consent of all churches on this point furnishes no contemptible argument. All the reasons for Creeds, Articles, Confessions, and Standards (as they are commonly, perhaps less properly, called) have the same force to prove the federal union of gospel-churches, as to prove any thing at all: or to speak properly, this federal association of church-members, is the very thing which they demonstrate, or else they demonstrate nothing at all. But I do not scruple to say, that the excellent apologies for these necessary measures of union in the faith and order of the gospel in the visible church, carry an unanswerable evidence, and have a force which bears down all opposition.

This state of the matter will serve to exhibit a rational, satisfactory

factory account of church-covenanting, which consists in two things, in general. (1.) In a joint profession of the faith of the gospel, 1 Tim. vi. 3. 4. Jude 3. (2.) In a joint engagement (each in his station) of church-members to walk in the order of the gospel, as becometh saints, Rom. xv. 5. 6. 7. Compare also Eph. ii. 12:—22. with chap. iv. 1. where the vocation wherewith that church was called, seems naturally to refer to their being made nigh by the blood of Jesus; their being made one new man in the bonds of social connection; their being fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; their being a building *fitly framed together*, growing unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom also they were builded *together*, for an habitation of God through the Spirit. ‘Now,’ says the apostle, ‘I beseech you that ye walk worthy of this vocation wherewith ye are called.’ Hereby they are enjoined to conduct themselves as persons made nigh to God by the blood of Jesus; as one new man; as fellow-citizens; as a building *fitly framed together*; since this was the vocation wherewith they were called. This shews the reasonableness of coming into an agreement, whereby Christians are more deeply impressed with convictions of their duty, and create confidence in the breasts of others, in reference to their harmonious views of, and zeal for, the comely order which is in Christ, as it is delineated in its several parts, particularly in that 4th chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

The degree of solemnity, necessary in this work, needs not be too scrupulously examined. As was before observed, a general assent will, in *some* instances, answer the same end, which, in *others*, must be obtained by a solemn oath; every inferior means being insufficient. This, however, is an undoubted maxim, that whatsoever is done, on these occasions, and in this business, should be done, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Col. iii. 17.; that is, says the judicious and accurate Dr. Guise, (*in locum*,) “with a conscientious regard to the authority and command of the Lord Jesus Christ; with an humble dependence on him for all direction, assistance, and acceptance; and with an eye to his, together with his Father’s glory.” The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him, 2 Thess.

ii. 1. are motives of that extensive and weighty nature and influence, that the belief, expectation, and desire of these solemn events, should animate and direct Christians, in every step, relative to their communion in a church-state. And the more that any agreement among Christians is influenced by these considerations, the more solemn it is.—I think it is worthy of our notice, that when Paul recommends *Phebe* of *Cenchrea* to the *saints* at *Rome*, he says, ‘Receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints,’ Rom. xvi. 2.; that is, says Dr. Guise, “Receive her into your “Christian affection, and holy communion, in the name, and “for the sake of the Lord Jesus, as it is fit and becoming for “one church to do toward the regular members of another, by “virtue of their common relation to Christ, as their Head, and “to each other, as saints.” And that this may be done by an immediate appeal to the God of truth, on some circumstanced occasions, I am well persuaded from the very nature of the thing; but that it is always necessary to express this appeal, in so many words, is more than I can see at present. To make *no distinction* of circumstances, in imposing and taking an oath, seems to approach rather too near a common, vain use of that great and dreadful name, the Lord our God. But that a church may jointly surrender up and devote their own selves, with all that they are and have, in a solemn manner, to the honour and service, influence, government, and disposal of the Lord Jesus, as their Head, Saviour, and King; as Guise explains, 2 Cor. viii. 5. is most reasonable to allow. Let me add, that I look on that explication as the clearest account of the matter which I have ever had the happiness to see, contained in so few words.*

* I would not be understood to confine the notion of *religious covenanting* within more contracted limits, than the word of God, and the reason of things require and admit. My intimate friend, the Rev. Mr. Pattison of Edinburgh, in a preface to *M'Ewen's Select Set of Essays*, p. 90.—96. has explained this point so fully, that I have nothing further to add upon it.

C H A P. VI.

The Redeemer's Appointment of Rule and Government in his Church.

THE alone Headship of Christ over his body the church, and his exclusive right of giving laws for her government and order, have so many full and clear attestations, in the word of God, that it would be most inexcusable to exclude them from a very important place in the system of divine truth. I know, some have maintained, that the civil magistrate may, in several cases, give law to the church, in her ecclesiastical capacity: but if this be supposed, it will be extremely hard, not to say, impossible, to find a consistent meaning to that testimony which the faithful and true Witness bore in the presence of Pontius Pilate, and sealed with his blood; 'My kingdom is not of this world.' Others ascribe a power of giving laws, in the Redeemer's kingdom, unto the church: but do these advocates for the church's honour duly consult her credit, safety, and interest? She is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. No decision of her's can bind the conscience, but what derives an authority from heaven. To be sure we must hear the church; and for this reason, because it is the pillar and ground of truth. It is worse than immodest to say, that any creature, or even any church, can prescribe unto, or lay an obligation upon, the God who is above. And it is as certain, that all the decent, useful, and honourable conduct of mankind, becomes a duty, in virtue of divine authority only; as, that man is a creature endued with reason, and that God is his Maker.

Every argument which proves man to be a creature, proves him to be dependent, and demonstrates the necessity of having constant recourse to the Author of his being, for a rule to his conversation. Believers, who are not under the law-covenant for life or death by their works, are, however, not without law to God, but under law to Christ, who hath all power given to him in heaven and in earth, to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. This Lord is the church's Judge; this Lord is her

her Lawgiver; this Lord is her King; and he will save her. He is able to bear the government upon his shoulders, and none else is qualified; for his knowledge is infallible as well as infinite, his wisdom is unerringly right, his power is irresistible and omnipotent, his goodness is boundless and communicative, his compassions are most tender, his faithfulness is like the great mountains, and his care is constant and watchful. Blessed is that people whose King is the Lord of hosts! He is their alone Head and Sovereign, Col. i. 18. Eph. i. 22. The church is neither vested with an internal, independent supremacy, an idea utterly inconsistent with a creature-state; nor is she under subjection, in what belongs to her as a church, to any man, or set of men, whatever, Matth. xxiii. 8. 9. 10.

The rule of the church, in general, consists in the exercise of the authority of Jesus Christ, given to her according to the laws he hath prescribed for her edification. I say, it is the exercise of the authority of Jesus Christ; this secures the honour of the Redeemer as King in Zion, and places the authority of the church in a state of absolute dependence on her blessed Head, and asserts her power to be only ministerial: if it rise higher, it is a treasonable encroachment on the prerogatives of Immanuel, in whom all authority over his church is vested by the Father, who sent and sealed him; and is moreover an absurd stretch of power over the souls and consciences of men, which no authority can reach, but *his* alone, and that under this single consideration, as it is *his*. The end and design of this ministerial rule, is the edification of the body of Christ, Rom. xv. 1. 2. 2 Cor. x. 8. and xiii. 10. The means of attaining this end, by the exercise of ministerial power, are as various, as the circumstances of the persons to be dealt with, 1 Thess. v. 11.—15.

That the church be without order and government, is so apparently absurd, that, I believe, no body has ventured to affirm, or even to suppose it: and if any inconsiderate fool has thought otherwise, his gross ignorance, or affected singularity, render him ridiculous and contemptible. But we shall find many who pretend to pay so great a respect to the inclinations of the people, and circumstances of expediency, discretion, and prudence; that they

they consider the preferable title of any one form of church-order to all the rest, to be warranted and supported by no higher authority, than *these* very precarious and varying reasons. This opinion is the more dangerous, that it is become popular. It may be called *specious*, but it is very *superficial*. We cannot receive it *alone*. If it be so indeed, then it follows, either, that there is no divine right of church-government; or else, that God hath appointed some order, but left it to the ingenuity of men to adjust the system, in any form which they think best. Every argument which shews the *necessity* of a divine revelation to fallen men, demonstrates the absurdity of either of these consequences. The church is confessedly a *society by divine right*, a right derived from divine revelation; and it must be unaccountably strange, if there be no appointments relative to the system of her order laid down in the book of God, where only we must expect to find the mode of this spiritual kingdom. I cannot believe that He, whose kingdom ruleth over all, has left his church without a system of laws to direct and regulate her conduct, in every case of importance, to his own honour, and to her welfare: the wisdom and compassion of her Head forbid my belief of such an opinion.

To prevent all mistakes, I premise, that we do not pretend to find every circumstance relative to the government of the church precisely set down in the word of God: we allow, "that there are some circumstances concerning the government "of the church, common to human actions and societies, which "are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word." But we maintain that every thing *substantial* and *essential* in her government, is *particularly* recorded in the scripture; and that the *circumstances* are included in the *general rules* which require decency, order, and edification, in all her managements.

The following reasons are offered to support our judgment in this way of thinking.

1. The fulness and sufficiency of the holy scriptures, which are able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, is an argument of no small weight. Especially when

when we recollect, that the intention of writing *some part* of that canon, is to teach us how to behave ourselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth; and moreover add, that *the man of God* is a fellow-citizen with the saints, and consequently not a few of *the good works* to which the scriptures are able throughly to furnish him, must refer to *duties in a church-state*; it impresses deep convictions on our minds, that the scripture, on this head, cannot be so defective as some affect to think.

2. What confirms our opinion is, that the Lord Jesus Christ is called and anointed to the office of a King, not only to govern his church invisibly, by the working of his Spirit; but visibly, by appointing ambassadors, Eph. iv. 11; assemblies, Matth. xviii. 20; laws, Matth. xxviii. 20. ordinances, Matth. xxviii. 19. 1 Cor. xi. 23, &c. and censures, John xx. 21, 22, 23. 1 Cor. v. 4, 5. All this appears to our view inconsistent with the pretence of our opponents.

3. We are well satisfied, on good authority, that the immediate and proper end of church-power is *not* a matter of decency and order only, but the edification of the body of Christ, in grace unto glory; particularly it is designed to establish them who stand, to gain an offending brother unto repentance, and to save his soul in the day of the Lord Jesus, 1 Tim. v. 20. 1 Cor. v. 5. Jude 22, 23. Now this we maintain as an undoubted maxim, that human institutions can but produce human effects; and whatsoever hath a spiritual efficacy must of necessity have a divine original. Since therefore church-order is designed for supernatural ends, and in the nature of a mean, to derive divine blessings on the church, it must be instituted by God himself.

4. The very particular account given us in scripture, of the officers, ordinances, and procedures in the Christian church, as will be observed afterwards, exhibits all which we conceive to be essential to the exercise of government, in the Christian church.

5. To all that is said, I shall subjoin another proof only, drawn from the *general*, I may say, *universal consent* of the churches. Can it be refused, that, in fact, every order endeavour to haul

over

over the scriptures to favour their plan? Is it not as true in this, as in other cases respecting religion, that the Bible is "Liber in quo qærit sua dogmata quisque; atque in quo reperit dogmata quisque sua?" If there are exceptions, are they not rather individual persons, than whole churches? And, I may add, are they not visibly attached to a party, whose cause, to their honest minds, seems to be incapable of a just defence on scripture-grounds? But however we may applaud their honesty, we dare not commend the goodness of their temper, as an imitable pattern; being so derogatory from the honour due to the oracles of God.

C H A P. VII.

The Oneness of the System of Church-Government.

WE cannot imagine, that our God, who is not the author of confusion, has given a sanction to more forms of order and government in his house, than one. A remark so self-evident, that to attempt a proof or illustration of it, would be only to darken wisdom, with words without knowledge.

We grant there was an extraordinary power committed by Christ unto his apostles; but maintain, that this power was to cease, being extraordinary in its kind, and peculiar to their persons, and properly antecedent to the existence of any church-state. Their office could admit of no succession. We may be assured of this, by attending to the things essentially requisite to the apostolic power and office; such as;

1. An immediate personal call from Christ himself, Gal. i. 1.
2. A commission *equally* extensive, to all nations, for their conversion, Mark xvi. 15. and to all the churches equally for their edification, 1 Cor. vii. 17. So that the notion of James being bishop of Jerusalem, and Peter of Rome, is ridiculous nonsense, utterly incompatible with their apostolical character.
3. Authority in all churches, *in their own persons*, comprehending *all that power*, which, in the ordinary constitution of churches, is competent to *many* individuals, 2 Cor. xiii. 10.
4. The possessing of extraordinary gifts; as infallibility in teaching, working of miracles, and speaking with tongues, 2 Cor. xii. 12.

These

These things considered, it is plain their office was peculiar, personal, and extraordinary. We must not therefore presume to imagine that it was designed for continuance by succession.

But though all that was extraordinary in their office had a period, it does not follow, that the ordinances which administer to the faith and order of the gospel are now set aside. No; the security for their being continually used is infallible, 1st. lix. 21. Psal. lxxii. 17. Matth. xvi. 18. and xxviii 20. A church is to be preserved in the world; office-bearers are to be employed in it; and a form of œconomy suitable to her condition, and the nature of the dispensation which she is under, is to be kept up, till the Saviour be revealed from heaven, at the consummation of all things. He that set in the church prophets and apostles, has set pastors and teachers also; and when the office of the former is superseded, the office of the latter still continues, and will remain, by divine appointment, till we ALL come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, Eph. iv. 13. This glorious end will not be obtained, till all who are predestinated, have been called, justified, and glorified. All which concerns the glory of God, and the prosperity and honour of the church, is unerringly and unalterably settled in the word of God, which is not yea and nay. It does not accommodate its doctrines to succeeding periods of time; nor to the changing tempers, humours, or fashions of place: like its divine Author, it is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

C H A P. VIII.

The Claim of Diocesan Episcopacy examined.

IT is a question of vast consequence in the present argument, and deserves all our attention; What is the proper form and order of the gospel-church? and in what manner, and by what persons is her discipline to be exercised? Whatever is worthy of notice in the several answers to this inquiry, runs into one or other of these well-known systems, viz. Episcopacy, Presbytery, or Independency.

When

When I have described the nature, I shall examine the truth, of each of these systems.

Episcopacy is a system of church-government by the diocesan bishops, who have the whole power of ordination and jurisdiction lodged in their own hand solely, to be exercised by them, with or without the advice of presbyters, who are allowed a power to advise and consult only; but not to decree and decide.

Presbytery is a system which ascribes the whole rule of the church to presbyters, exercising their power in connection, without any superiority of one to another. And, where there is occasion and opportunity, these connections, in which their office-rule is exercised, are sessional, classical, and synodical, in a gradual subordination to one another.

Independency is a system which makes every congregation, assembling for stated acts of church-fellowship in one place, a distinct church, and ascribes to every such congregational church, a complete power of jurisdiction within itself, *independent* of any authority without it, or in connection with it. Some of them agree with Presbyterians, in limiting the exercise of authoritative rule, so far, as to confine it to *elders* in the church; but the greater part of them plead, that it belongs to the *community of the faithful, as such*.

I shall endeavour, by a careful attention to the word of God, to bring out an impartial judgment about the merits of each cause.

The easiest and fairest method of proceeding in this enquiry seems to be this: to examine what officers Christ hath set for continued use in his church; and what powers he hath conferred on them for her edification. If we can precisely determine these with scripture-evidence, the controversy must rest on that determination. The law of God we hold to be so sacred, that it ought not to be altered, on any pretence, Prov. xxx. 6. and so holy, just, and good, that it can never be neglected, transgressed, or despised, without a grievous crime, II. viii. 20. Under these convictions, the most unbiassed attention to its decisions, without favour to any party, is highly necessary.

To begin with diocesan bishops: it must be owned, that we
read

read of the institution, qualifications, and duties of *bishops*, in many places of scripture; Acts xx. 28. 1 Tim. iii. 1.—7. Tit. i. 7, 8, 9. and in many others. But that these were diocesans, who had no immediate connection with one congregation, but had the charge of many congregations equally, and the whole power of jurisdiction in them vested in their own persons, is more, and a great deal more, than we are able to see in the fore-cited, or indeed in all the other passages which refer to bishops, designation or office. We are sure, that in many places of scripture, bishop and presbyter are synonymous; but as for this diocesanism, we know not whence it is. We conceive the scripture applies the same names, assigns the same functions, enjoins the same duties, and requires the same qualifications, equally, without any distinction, of bishops, and presbyters, or elders.

1. Because the apostle, after describing the qualifications of *elders*, Tit. i. 5, 6. subjoins this reason for insisting on these qualifications, vers. 7. 'For a *bishop* must be blameless,' &c. Grant that these characters denote the *same person*, and the reasoning is conclusive and convincing; suppose them to describe offices of different orders, and the reasoning will be quite absurd and incoherent.

2. There were many bishops in the city of Philippi, at least more than one, Phil. i. 1. not diocesan bishops, I hope; two or three cities, such as Philippi, are known to be little enough for one of the least of them*.

* The humorous and satirical Heckerlingill has observed, that our wise men of England have made our English bishoprics out of two words in Tit. i. 5. [*κατα πολιν*] in every city, ill understood: the text runs in these words, 'Or-dain elders in every city, as I appointed thee.' Cities and bishoprics must be convertible terms; and hence a small place is sometimes made a city; and, because there must be one, and only one bishop in every city, if another place, ten times as large, happen not to be an Episcopal see, it must not be called a city, but a town. He illustrates this, by comparing the small city of Carlisle, with the large town of Colchester. But, as he observes, it is a little against these ingenious conceits—That the persons to be ordained were [*πρεσβυτεροι*], elders; that more than one of them were to be ordained in every single city;—and that [*κομη*], a village, and [*πολις*], a city, are promiscuously used by

3. The elders of the church of Ephesus are, in direct terms, called [*ἐπισκοποι*] bishops, Acts xx, 17. 28. compared.

4. When the apostle Peter writes to the ELDERS of the churches, he charges them in these words, 1 Pet. v. 1, 2, 3. 'Feed the flock of God which is among you, [*ἐπισκοποῦντες*], taking the oversight, (or exercising the office of bishops over them), not as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.' From the whole, we gather, that, according to the design and meaning of the Holy Ghost, elders and bishops are the same.

The keenest advocates for Episcopacy are so little in one another's secrets; or, perhaps, so galled between Popery and Presbytery, that their most accurate and cautious casuists have incurred very odious imputations in making their defences against both. They maintain their cause against Presbyterians with the very same reasons which the Catholics had used against themselves: and, if the Catholics thereupon claim their friendship, and retort their own arguments, they gravely retract, and furnish an answer to the Catholic, which effectually gives up all that the Presbyterian demands in the contest about diocesan Episcopacy, and strongly supports all that he affirms. It has been alledged, that they shift sides, and use the enemies armour, occasionally, in the field of this controversy: and, though I believe there is good enough reason to say so, I dare not be so ungenerous or unjust, as to impute this inconstancy to a dishonest, mean, or bad principle. They are too eminent and honourable to be guilty of any thing so base, if they were conscious of it. But what can they do? Engaged, as they are, in defending a cause which is fundamentally the same with that which is confessed at Rome; they are under a fatal necessity of betraying it, whenever they vindicate themselves against the attacks of those who would compel them upon their own princi-

sacred and profane writers, 1 Chron. iv. 32. The villages were, Etam, &c. —five cities. Compare Luke ii. 4. with John vii. 42. what is called [*πολις*] a city, in the one, is called [*κομμη*], a town, or village, in the other. It is plain, the ridiculous distinction was not coined in the apostolic age; but has been invented to help out a desperate cause.

ples,

ples, to return and acknowledge their allegiance to the Roman see: and while they rigorously defend the honour of their own system against dissenters, they demolish the bulwark which they had been at so great pains to raise up for their security against Rome. It is undeniably true, whatever be the cause of it, that their language is confounded, and their champions, like the young men belonging to Joab and Abner, catch every one his fellow by the head, and thrust their swords in their fellow's sides, and so they fall down together. This is not a loose, unsupported assertion. It is clear from facts which need no proof. Whoever would satisfy his curiosity, without much labour or loss of time, in reviewing the history and progress of this unnatural intestine war, in the communion of Protestant Prelacy, under the conduct of her most zealous and sensible writers, will find an useful guide in "Ayton's Appendix, subjoined to his book on the original constitution of the Christian church;" or in "Jamieson's sum of the Episcopal controversy." In both these pieces, the reader will see the most renowned writers in the cause of Prelacy, building up and throwing down, whatever has any tolerable shew of kindness to the divine right of diocesan Episcopacy.* And if the divine right of this system is so doubtful, even in the judgment of its heartiest friends, what can be said for the highest dignities of the order? If it be so questionable, whether the diocesan bishop is from heaven, or of men; it is still more reasonable to doubt, whether the office of archbishops has any higher authority, than the wisdom of the flesh.

But as I am fully satisfied the diocesan's character is wholly unknown to the holy scriptures; every inquiry about his qualifications, powers, and office, is entirely superseded.

* I would beg leave to observe farther, that the reader will find this argument upon the head of *Diocesan Episcopacy*, treated in a concise but most judicious manner, in a late publication at Edinburgh in the year 1767, intitled, *Letters on the Constitution, Government, and Discipline, of the Christian Church*, Letter VII. The whole piece well deserves the attention of all the friends of practical piety.

C H A P. IX.

The Exercise of Church-government is committed to Elders : who are of two kinds ; such as both teach and rule, and such as rule, but do not teach.

THE word *elder* was frequently used among the Jews, and from them it seems to have been adopted into the Christian church. The best way to ascertain its precise signification, will be to enquire, in what sense it is used by Moses and the prophets. In every language, an elder, when it is taken properly without any figure, is a term which respects age. Men of age, from long experience, extensive observation, and just reflections, were supposed to know more than the rest of mankind, and accordingly, in ancient times, were preferred in offices of public trust, to the more youthful and unexperienced. In time, this title of dignity and trust, whenever it was used in a figurative meaning, came to be appropriated to them, who presided in, or ruled over, any society, and executed its laws.

But it is never used, in the word of God, to signify an *absolute, supreme ruler* ; it is invariably applied to an *inferior, subordinate authority*, and *ministerial power*. Kings and princes are no where called elders ; though it is very usual to call, by this name, men who are placed in authority under them : hence we read of the elders of the land of Egypt,—of Suecoth,—of Jabez,—of Bethlehem,—of Israel, &c. &c. This name still describes a very respectable body of magistrates, in every corporation-town through England, called aldermen, or elder-men. And the ancient metaphorical use of the word is still preserved in many of the modern languages, wherein *Seigneur, Signior*, and such like words, which differ according to the idiom and dialect only of the country, signify *lord*, which is a name of authority and power. It is evident, these words are only corruptions of the Latin word *senior*, or elder. This designation is applied to persons indifferently, whether vested with civil or ecclesiastical authority. There were elders of the priests who ministered before the Lord, as well as elders of the land of Egypt. We find elders frequently mentioned

mentioned in the New Testament, where the word is generally applied, in distinction from the body of the people, to a particular order of men, who were set apart to the special work of overseeing and ruling the flock of God. Dr. Owen justly observes, that "the rule and government of the church, or *the execution of the authority of Christ therein*, is in the hand of the elders. All elders in office have rule, and none have rule but elders. As such, rule doth belong to them. The apostles, by virtue of their *especial office*, were intrusted with all church-power; but therefore they were elders also; 1 Pet. v. 1. 2 John 1. 3 John 1. See Acts xxi. 17. 1 Tim. v. 17. They are *some of them*, on other accounts, called *bishops, pastors, teachers, ministers, guides*; but what belongs unto any of them, in point of rule, or what interest they have therein, it belongs unto them *as elders*, and not otherwise, Acts xx. 17. 28." See his *True Nature of a Gospel-church*, p. 128. 129.

In the assembly's *Directory for Church-government*, they say, "It is agreeable to, and warranted by, the word of God, that some others, besides the ministers of the word, be church-governors, to join with the ministers of the church; which officers reformed churches commonly call elders." This is a fundamental article of presbytery; and though it has been warmly opposed, I hope to be able to show, that it is no human invention, but the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, who has distinguished the office of elders into two sorts; namely, those who are called both to *teach and to rule* in the church, and those who are called to *rule* only.

To illustrate and establish what I have just now affirmed, it will be proper to follow this method.

1. To explain the qualifications,—call,—and office-duties of the elder who both teacheth and ruleth.
2. To state the scriptural authority for the office of the elder who is called to rule and govern only.
3. To lay down the qualifications,—call,—and office-duties of this ruling elder.
4. To show that the original constitution of the apostolic churches lodged all the exercise of their government in the hand

of

of these two classes of elders, acting unitedly, with equal authority, in subordinate courts.

5. To represent the advantages of this method of exercising church-government: and

6. To describe the qualifications,—call,—and office-duties of the deacon.

A clear discussion of these points will explain all that is necessary to enable us to apprehend, in a proper light, the constitutional principles of the Presbyterian system.

CHAP. X.

The Qualifications, Call, and Office-duties of the Elders, who labour in the Word and Doctrine.

IF any man ask, by what authority ministers labour in the word and doctrine? the answer is, that Christ appointed them; and so it hath seemed good in his sight, that he might, by the foolishness of preaching, save them that believe, 1 Cor. i. 21. Wherever churches were gathered, pastors and teachers were appointed, Acts xiv. 23. Faith, without which it is impossible to please God, 'cometh by hearing, and hearing by the 'word of God.' But how shall men hear without preachers? Rom. x. 14. 15. 17. They are commanded and encouraged to this honourable work, Matth. xxviii. 19. 20. And,

Without examining the divine right of a gospel-ministry, which, I am fully satisfied, may be established with all the advantages of a demonstration which any thing of the kind will admit of; I shall endeavour to explain, (1.) The qualifications: (2.) The call; and, (3.) The office-duties of the teaching elder.

SECT. I.

The Qualifications of the Elders who labour in the Word and Doctrine.

THEY must be furnished with proper endowments, to dispose and make them fit for that office. The servant must, in a measure, be like his Master, who is the good Shepherd, and whose pastoral qualifications are an example and pattern to all those,

those, whom, under him, he calls unto the same office. Without some prevailing conformity to him herein, no man can assure his own conscience, or satisfy the church of God, that he is lawfully called unto this office. The qualifications of *Jesus the good Shepherd* are referable to five heads.

1. He was furnished with spiritual gifts and abilities by unmeasurable communications of the Holy Ghost, fitting him for the discharge of his office, *Is. xi. 2. 3. and lxi. 1. 2. 3. Luke iv. 14.* And this in a measure is required in every inferior pastor, *Eph. iv. 7.—11.*

2. Compassion and love to his sheep constitute a shining part of the character of this good Shepherd. He laid down his life for his sheep, *John x. 11. 14. 15. 16.* The same love to the eternal interests of the souls of men, in a measure, should constrain them who feed under Christ, to take on them the pastoral office: without this qualification, they are but hirelings, and cannot care for the flock.

3. Continual attention to the state of his flock was another remarkable endowment of *Jesus the good Shepherd*, who laid down his life for his sheep; of him who waters his vineyard every moment, and keeps it night and day, that none may hurt it; who never slumbers nor sleeps; and who will lose none of them whom the Father hath given him. Some measure of the same temper is a necessary endowment of every shepherd employed by Christ to feed his sheep and his lambs. He must travail, as in birth, till Christ be formed in his hearers; must be instant in season and out of season, omitting no opportunity of dispensing every ordinance in its place; must administer *personal* admonition, exhortation, comfort, reproof, or instruction, as the case of individuals seems to require. His design in all this should be, to keep them from evil; and to present them faultless before *Jesus Christ*, at his second coming.

4. Zeal for the glory of God, in his whole ministry, and in all the aims of it, animated the great and good Shepherd, *John ii. 17.* The manner of expression bears, that his zeal was altogether inexpressible. In this also inferior shepherds should imitate their blessed Master, *Gal. iv. 18. Rev. iii. 19.* The want
of

of this accounts for the deadness, unfaithfulness, and unfruitfulness of a gospel-ministry in the world.

5. Jesus was in himself absolutely holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, Heb. vii. 26. This, in some degree of eminency, should adorn the character of these who minister in the church, 2 Tim. ii. 21.

These are amiable and characteristic endowments of gospel-ministers: to want all appearance of them, utterly disqualifies for the ministerial office; and to possess them in a low degree, derogates in the same proportion from eminency in their character.

S E C T. II.

The Call of teaching Elders to their Office.

ALL that is necessary to be said on this may be reduced into two heads, the necessity, and nature of their call.

I. With respect to the necessity of a call to the ministry, we affirm, that no man can, or may, take this office upon him, or discharge the peculiar duties of it, with authority, unless he be called and set apart thereunto, according to the mind of Christ. However unrelishing this assertion may be, we dare not yield it up. For,

1. Christ, in his own person, and by his authority, was the Author of this office, Eph. iv. 11. 12.
2. He appointed it to continue in the church till the consummation of all things, Eph. iv. 13. Matth. xxviii. 20.
3. He laid the whole weight of the order, rule, and edification of his church upon it, Acts xx. 28. 1 Pet. v. 1. 2. 3.
4. He hath enjoined the church to honour and obey those who enjoy and exercise it, 1 Tim. v. 17. Heb. xiii. 7. 17.
5. He hath connected such power and authority with this office, as none can take to themselves, Matth. xviii. 18.
6. He hath appointed a standing rule of calling men to it; as we shall see immediately.
7. He hath committed an accountable trust unto those who undertake it, Col. iv. 17. 1 Tim. vi. 20.
8. He hath granted special promises of present assistance, and
of

of future glory unto the faithful discharge of it, Matth. xxviii. 20, 1 Pet. v. 4. And lastly,

9. The general force of that rule, Heb. v. 4. intimates, that none ought to undertake any sacred office without a divine call.

When these things are considered in their united weight and evidence, it is plain, and I cannot forbear repeating it, that no man may take this office upon him, or discharge its peculiar duties, without a regular call.

II. The nature of that call to the pastoral office, which we esteem regular, may be taken up in two things, which may be called *its constituent parts*, election and ordination. Neither more nor less is required to the call we speak of.

1. Election is essential, in ordinary officers, to a regular call to the office of a gospel-ministry. By this we mean, that act of the whole church, including the brotherhood with the elders, whereby they choose a person whom they know, and have tried, and found, upon trial, meetly qualified, in point of capacity, piety, and prudence, to discharge the several duties of the pastoral office to their edification, and invite him, (as the man of Macedonia in a vision invited Paul), to come and help them in the service of the gospel. Concurrence in the choice by common suffrage, is no act of church-authority, or office-power, but is highly necessary on many considerations; at least, the concurrence of the greater part of that congregation, where the labours of the pastor are to be employed, is very requisite. Of all the ways of calling men to office, under the Old or New Testament, one only remains for the ordinary continuation of the church. Since the apostles and evangelists, none are immediately chosen by God; since the Levitical priesthood was abolished, none succeed to office-power in the church by carnal generation; these, therefore, who labour in the gospel, must be called to officiate in a public station, by choice and election.

However common it is become, in our times, to supply vacant churches with ministers upon the ground of a patron's presentation, who is supposed to have a title to dispose of the temporalities in a parish; we are sure, that from the beginning it was not so. It is no small prejudice to this cause, as it is commonly under-

derstood and managed, that it is not even pretended by its friends, to have any countenance in the word of God. It is infinitely removed from the faith and order of the gospel-church, which stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. The weapons of the Christian warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God. The champions for patronage have been frequently challenged to put on this armour of light, and venture the issue of their favourite scheme, on the clear, impartial, and decisive testimony of the word: but these good-natured gentlemen decline to use this sword of the Spirit, perhaps, because some of them have not proved it, and others, who are better acquainted with the nature of it, apprehend, with some reason, that it is more likely to wound their own cause, than to defend from the attacks of the adversary. They content themselves with weapons of their own warfare, which are carnal, not spiritual; and mighty, not through God, but through *men*, who seek to raise a monument to their fame, or promote mean interested schemes by their presentations, at the great hazard, if not the certain and grievous loss, of the edification of precious and immortal souls. If they appeal to *reason*; we are not afraid to maintain our cause at her venerable bar, and could, upon this question, cheerfully submit to her impartial sentence; Whether, on the supposition, that the church is wholly a spiritual kingdom, subject to the Lord Jesus Christ only, who hath, by his authority, set proper officers in her; and privileged her with a total exemption, in her church-capacity, from the arbitrary dictates and impositions of men; and hath particularly directed her managements and conduct, with a constant regard to general edification, through the proper use of his own institutions: whether, I say, on the supposition of all these things, it is *reasonable* to allow a patron a power of introducing a man to a pastoral relation in a parish, upon the consideration of the said patron's worldly interest in that parish, which, in the nature of things, is merely accidental, and foreign, to her constitution as a church? If the brethren, *as men*, have a natural right to judge, with whom they would intrust the care of their health and estates; and if they may lawfully choose and employ for themselves, according to their
their

their own judgment, with what propriety can they, *as Christians*, be robbed of the more interesting privilege of judging and choosing, in concerns of a spiritual nature? If disgust, dissention, or even rebellion itself, might necessarily flow from men's having their *natural* privileges wrested out of their hands; can approbation, unanimity, and obedience be expected, if their *Christian* privileges should be wantonly extorted from them?

I know the reason commonly assigned, is the indispensable force of the civil law, which gives the legal patron an indisputable right to exercise an absolute power in presenting a minister. So far as this respects the established church in Scotland, it is quite from the purpose of the persons, who are weak or base enough to plead it, as is justly observed by the ingenious author of the *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, who says, "The law maintains its own ground, as far as it goes, and is irresistible; the only question is, How we (that is, the church-judicatories) shall act as to what is left to us to determine: if the law hindered us to determine on any side we please, such causes never would come before us." And it is most certain that all the mischievous consequences of the patronage-act in that part of the united kingdom, must be imputed to the cowardice or connivance of a prevailing party in that church. The way to support their constitutional independency, has been again and again pointed out to them, and disregarded. See the preface to *M'Ewen's Essays*, 2 vols. printed at Edinburgh, 1767.

Some who look on presentation-calls with the utmost dislike, have struck out another method, which is no less alarming to Christian liberty, and, if prosecuted, might produce as bad consequences. They are not content to allow ecclesiastical consistories the right of licensing and ordaining public teachers, a right which certainly belongs to them, Acts xiii. 1, 2, 3. They, moreover, lodge in their hand, the right of electing pastors, and determining their labours to particular congregations. But from the beginning it was not so, Acts i. 15.—26. and vi. 1.—6. and xiv. 23. This scheme when it falls to be managed by a corrupt party, is well calculated to promote the worst designs; at best, it is a robbery on the privileges of the Christian people, and an

invasion of their just rights. The disciples proceeded with a power exercised equally by them all, in choosing a successor to Judas, to be a witness of our Lord's resurrection; and the multitude of the disciples looked out among them, by the direction of the twelve apostles, seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom they appointed to serve tables. These disciples were afterwards called Christians; so that to be a Christian and a disciple was the same thing, and consequently the disciples were not church-officers. Moreover, it is expressly said, that the whole multitude of these disciples chose seven of their number to be deacons, whom they set before the apostles, and when they (the apostles) had prayed, they laid their hands on them, Acts vi. 5, 6. The brethren looked them out, and made the return of their election; and the twelve appointed them over their business, by authoritative ordination, vers. 3. And the reasoning is good from the less to the greater. If deacons were chosen, neither by a single man, nor by a church-judicatory; but by the whole multitude of the disciples; it is, at least, as reasonable, that pastors and teachers be chosen to particular congregations, by a free popular election*.

* I do even affirm, that the *people's choice or consent is essentially necessary to the pastoral relation*: for as no man can be the member of a congregation which is under a particular pastor, *without his own consent*; so neither can any man be a pastor, or perform the work of a pastor, to a people who do not voluntarily consent to commit themselves to his pastoral inspection and conduct. That the gospel-church is a voluntary society, in opposition to all external compulsion and impositions whatever, is one of the essential principles of her constitution. And therefore, if the people be *capable of a free choice*: if God, and reason, and scripture *give* them this right, by natural necessary inference, and express declaration; if all the churches, constituted and guided by scriptural, apostolical rules, have always, hitherto, *chosen*, and do still so *choose* their own pastors: if it be *essential* to the pastoral relation, and to the right discharge of its duties; and, if no people, regardless of God, and their own true spiritual, everlasting interests, can *give up* this right, and none can warrantably *assume* and invade it:—if these things be so, as they *certainly* are; how strong and obvious is the consequence,—that it belongs to Christian congregations to choose their own pastors, or, **AT LEAST**, to consent cordially to the choice which is made for them?

The

The choice of the multitude of the disciples was necessary, but not the whole which was necessary, to invest the deacons with their office; for being *chosen* by their brethren, they were *appointed* by the twelve apostles. We also plead,

2. That ordination is another constituent part of a ministerial call. This follows upon election, and is an orderly separating to the ministry, such men as the Holy Ghost appears to have called. It is the solemn introduction, or investiture of them who are found to be duly qualified, into the ministerial office, by significant, appointed actions, in the name and authority of Christ. The *office and power* are from *Christ*, the king and head of his church: ordination is only the formal, solemn delivery of them, by his *instruments*.

It has been warmly contested, who are the instruments of conveying this office; or, in other words, who are authorized to ordain ministers. Every secular person or persons must be excluded; and the right confined to elders. *Ordinis est ordinare*, saith the great primate Usher; that is, It belongs to order only to ordain. If our rule for ordination to the ministry be the New Testament, as it undoubtedly is, where is there any direction, any command, any example, of the *people's* ordaining ministers? The conveyance of this office to others, is a part of the trust which Christ hath committed to ministers, in their commission, 2 Tim. ii. 2.

However zealous some have been, to establish the scriptural warrant for diocesan Episcopal-ordination, we are well supported in referring it to the Presbytery *only*, or bench of assembled elders, constituted in the name of Christ, 1 Tim. iv. 14. Acts xiii. 1, 2, 3, and xiv. 23. And we are assured, every attempt to support Episcopal-ordination, as distinct from this, must be unsuccessful.

Apostolic ordination was performed, by prayer, and fasting, and imposition of hands, and commending them to the Lord. Their ordination was not gone about as a trifling matter, but upon mature consideration, and with a just concern of mind for the honour of Christ, and for the comfort and benefit of his church. It was solemnized,

With prayer to God in behalf of his church, and of the candidates

dates to be ordained. The ordainers prayed suitably to the nature of the case, and the interest of each party in the weighty transaction. Conjoint, importunate prayer, on such occasions, is very necessary, both as it is the great sanctifying means of every duty and enjoyment, and as it is an essential part of public worship.

With fasting, as well as prayer, to give the greater composure to their minds, and elevation, as well as ardour of heart, to their devotion: for *this* is the proper end of fasting, and renders it an holy and divine service. Before our blessed Lord began his public ministry, he *fasted* forty days and forty nights, Matth. iv. 2. 17. And before he chose his twelve apostles, he spent the whole night in *prayer* to God, Luke vi. 12, 13. When Paul and Barnabas were separated to the ministry among the Gentiles, it was by *prayer and fasting*, Acts xiii. 2, 3. And when they ordained elders in every church, they *prayed and fasted*, Acts xiv. 23..

With imposition of hands, which is a particular sign of ordination to the ministry. Without all dispute, this sign was used in the apostolic age: when the apostles had prayed, they *laid their hands* on the deacons, Acts vi. 6. When Paul and Barnabas were separated for the work whereunto the Holy Ghost called them, their brethren *fasted, prayed, and laid hands* on them, Acts xiii. 2. 3. The *hands of the presbytery* were *laid* on Timothy, 1 Tim. iv. 14. And he is directed to ordain others to the ministry, by the *same sign*, 1 Tim. v. 22. I cannot see good reason to believe, that this is one of the primitive ceremonies which through length of time, is worn out of use or laid aside, because it was a sign of something extraordinary, which has now ceased. It is readily granted, that through the laying on of the apostles hands the Holy Ghost was given, Acts viii. 18.; and that they laid their hands on the sick, and they were healed, Mark xvi. 18. But was this all the use of laying hands on persons? None who knows what he says will say so: for it was sometimes a token of blessing, in distinction from both; as we read Mark x. 16. 'Jesus took the children up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.' When we use this form of ordination, we do not intend it as a sign of conveying any extraordinary
miraculous

miraculous gifts; nor as a visible token of invisible saving grace; nor as an actual conveyance of ministerial power. But we use it, only as a significant sign of the separation of the person ordained to the ministerial function. Hereby the elders who ordain, testify, that they *approve*, and *desire a blessing on*, those whom they admit to the fellowship of the gospel. In this view of it, I conceive, it may and ought to be used in every age. It is certainly most natural to understand *the laying on of hands*, which is mentioned, 1 Tim. v. 22. 'Lay hands suddenly on no man, in this light. All who acknowledge a standing ministry to be a divine institution, allow that ordination is spoken of in these words. To *lay hands* upon one, is to *ordain* him. The reason must be this, That in ordaining ministers, it was usual to lay hands upon them. But may not our apostle use this manner of speech, because Timothy, being himself furnished with some remarkably eminent gifts of the Spirit, communicated them while he ordained, by laying on *his* hands? I apprehend the conjecture is both daring and groundless: for it is not supported, either by the text or context; and, I think, the words will not admit it. The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were not properly under the controul of revealed laws, or subject to human direction. The person who wrought the miracle, and the persons on whom it was performed, or in whose favour it was wrought, had respectively a divine, supernatural impression relative to it, which was attended with a certifying evidence, that was not subject to previous thought, inclination, or design. If this was the case, where is the propriety of understanding this command, 'Lay hands suddenly on no man,' as if it had any respect to miraculous powers, or extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost? In the laying on of his hands it is supposed, that Timothy might be rash and inconsiderate; and therefore, he is commanded to ponder well the path of his feet, and to be fully acquainted with the men, upon whom he laid hands; and to use the utmost caution, and obtain the highest satisfaction, previous to that step. Now all this is utterly irreconcilable to all the ideas which we can form of what was extraordinary and miraculous: for the blessed Spirit gave immediate direction about the seasons, objects,

objects, and exertions of every thing of that kind. And I cannot see any thing extraordinary in the ordination of Timothy, in whom there was a gift not to be neglected, which had been given him, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, 1 Tim. iv. 14. It is true, this gift was given him by prophecy; but, I believe, all agree that this phrase is to be explained, by chap. i. 18. 'This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee;' and intimates, that he was early chosen to a particular honour, in the service of God. When the time for accomplishing these prophecies came, he received a gift, by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery: a gift which he must not neglect; but must stir up, improve, and daily cultivate, in the manner pointed out, and in the use of the means directed to, vers. 6. and downwards to the close of the chapter. Upon an impartial survey, the manner and means of using this gift will be found to have nothing extraordinary about them. And therefore it seems to be a just inference, that the gift itself was ordinary, which was thus exercised; namely, THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY; of which the duties laid down in the surrounding context, are a clear enough proof. And,

Lastly, The apostles solemnized the ordination of gospel-ministers, with a solemn, serious, and hearty recommendation of them to the Lord. Acts xiv. 23. 'They commended them to the Lord in whom they believed.'—This is a suitable conclusion of an ordination-solemnity; and is to be done by *praying* suitably for them to the Lord, recommending, resigning, and delivering them up into his hands, to his love, and care, and trust, as a sacred and devoted thing, which he will receive, watch over, keep, and dispose of, according to his holy pleasure. This was invariably practised in apostolical ordinations, it would seem: for when Paul and Barnabas set out on their ministry to the Gentiles, at their ordination, they were recommended to the grace of God, Acts xiv. 26. And in the progress of their ministry, wherever they planted churches, they ordained elders, in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, commending them to the grace and care, guidance and blessing of the Lord Jesus, that they

they might be more and more furnished for, protected, assisted, and succeeded in, all their holy ministrations.

Because this ordination succeeds the choice of a particular church, and completes a ministerial call, it must, in all ordinary cases, fix a pastoral relation between the elders and the churches in which they are ordained. Hence we read of the elders of the church of Ephesus, Acts xx. 17. whom the Holy Ghost had made overseers over the flock there, vers. 28. ; and of elders ordained in every church, Acts xiv. 23. Again, we read of elders to be ordained in every city, Tit. i. 5. And,

Because hands are not to be suddenly laid on any man, it is plain, that none ought to be ordained, till they approve themselves, upon a proper trial by those that are to ordain them, to be duly qualified, both in life and ministerial abilities, according to scripture-characters of teaching elders. And,

Moreover, because the Holy Ghost has committed the work of ordaining men to the office of the ministry unto his ministers, in their representative-capacity, Acts xiii. 1. 2. 3. it must be great presumption, and downright enthusiasm, to assume that office, under a pretence of being inwardly called by the Spirit; where the call of the Holy Ghost does not shew itself, by the church's separating the man, who may warrantably execute it. And unless such pretenders can demonstrate, that they are extraordinarily called, by some extraordinary proof, I must be excused in thinking they are presumptuously bold invaders of an office, to which they have no call. To say they have the call of the Spirit, while they have not been separated by the church, is an injurious imputation to the Holy Ghost, and denies the only token, we can reasonably expect, of what, on this head, seems good to the blessed Spirit.

One observation more shall conclude this section. The elders of one or several churches, may unite in separating an elected candidate, by prayer and fasting, and imposition of hands, for ministerial services, in another congregation, or as a missionary among them that are not gathered into a church-state, Acts xiii. 1. 2. 3. and xiv. 23. The evidence of this observation will more fully appear in the 13th chapter of this treatise.

S E C T. III.

The Office-duties of the teaching Elder.

THEIR office being spiritual in its nature and design, the duties of it must be spiritual also. It is quite out of their character, to entangle themselves with the affairs of this life, 2 Tim. ii. 4. to be civil judges about worldly property, Luke xii. 14. or, to act, in virtue of their office and place, as a constitutive part of the civil legislature. Inquire, I pray thee, of the former ages of truly apostolic, primitive Christianity, and prepare thyself to the search of those fathers, and see if there be such a thing allowed unto the ambassadors for Christ. All the duties of their office are reducible to these two general heads, *Teaching, and Ruling.*

Pastoral teaching is one essential part of their work. They are pastors to feed, and teachers to instruct, the flock of God. The word of truth is the food of souls, and the instruction of life. It is the honour of the faithful minister of the New Testament to be mighty in the scriptures, through reading, meditation, prayer, and the careful use of every appointed means; that he may hold forth the word of life; rightly divide the word of truth; defend the gospel; stop the mouth of adversaries; convince the ungodly; put to silence them that oppose; assist, relieve, and settle tender consciences and doubting souls; satisfy honest inquirers; establish believers concerning the faith of Christ; further and help the joy of saints; solve difficulties; answer objections; reconcile seeming contradictions; and explain scripture-mysteries. He must handle the word of God neither *deceitfully*, by putting artful glosses on it, to serve a particular purpose which is foreign to its general scope; nor *partially*, by shunning to declare the whole counsel of God. His doctrine must be *sound*, and he must seek to find out *acceptable words*, that what he says may be upright, even words of truth. "He should be unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: not as many, who corrupt the word of God; but, as of sincerity, and as of God, in the sight of God, should he speak in Christ, by manifestation of
" the

“ the truth, commending himself to every man’s conscience, in “ the sight of God.” He is like a candle, which is lighted up for general use, and therefore should teach *publicly*, in the chief places of concourse. In imitation of the apostle, he should faithfully labour to instruct his people *privately*, from house to house; administering, as occasion requires, seasonable counsels, cautions, exhortations, and encouragements, Acts xx. 20. Catechising is an excellent means of informing the mind, engaging the attention, and affecting the heart; and is a part of the ministerial duty of the evangelical pastor, Gal. vi. 6. ‘ Let him ‘ that is taught [*κατηχούμενος*, catechised] in the word, communicate to him that teacheth [*κατηχῶντι*, catechiseth], in all good ‘ things.’ Having obtained mercy of God, to be put into the ministry, he must not only declare the truths of his word; but administer the *sacraments* of baptism and the Lord’s supper, according to his appointment, Matth. xxviii. 19. 20. 1 Cor. xi. 23.—26. In a word, it is his duty, and should be his daily endeavour, to make full proof of his ministry, and to be, for his people, a faithful minister of Christ, as Epaphras was for the Colossians.*

Ruling over the church is another characteristic duty of gospel-ministers, Heb. xiii. 7. 17. ‘ Remember, and obey them ‘ which have the rule over you,’ [*ἡγούμενοι*, your leaders, or guides.] Beza on the place has observed, that this name is infinitely removed from all ambitious usurpation, and yet expressive of very great authority. It certainly bears, that ministers should rule in the fear of God, and interest themselves in the order, discipline, and government of the flock of Christ, for its spiritual edification and good. And this authority they should exercise, not as lords over God’s heritage, nor with an imperious and dictatorial spirit, as meaning to raise themselves above controul, and to

* The reader will find this point treated with great candour and precision, by my very worthy and honoured father and tutor, the Rev. Mr. James Fisher of Glasgow; in his sermon, preached immediately after the ordination of the Rev. Mr. James Erskine, at Stirling, intitled, *The Character of a faithful Minister*, on Col. i. 7. It is subjoined to the Rev. Mr. Ebenezer Erskine’s Sermons, in four volumes, printed by Gray and Alston, 1761.

make their own will the law of every public measure. The rule of evangelical pastors lies, not in giving laws, broaching doctrines, or exercising any authority of their own; but in explaining, establishing, and defending the laws and doctrines of Christ, and inculcating them on the consciences of his people, by his sole authority, and exemplifying them in their own faith and holy conversation. The ministers of the gospel are appointed to watch for the souls of their people, to inspect their principles, temper, and behaviour; to warn the unruly, and after every private means has been found unsuccessful, to present the offender to be judged by the church, and to concur with other church-rulers in every necessary step of discipline warranted by Christ's appointment. All pretences to church-authority, beyond this ministerial power, are really a criminal usurpation, and an Anti-christian lordship.

C H A P. XI.

The Scriptural Warrant for the Elder that doth rule and govern only, but doth not teach.

THE church is God's heritage; and the ordinances for her government, as well as for her instruction, are of divine institution. The hazard seems to be nearly equal, to exclude an officer of his appointing, and to acknowledge one appointed by men only. We cannot think God will honour the inventions of men, however they may be dignified with the specious names of useful, decent, agreeable, or prudent contrivances; yet if they are an addition to his system, will he not say, 'Who hath required these things at your hands?' We may boast of our authority, when we cannot boast of our success; but we have reason even to suspect our success, when we cannot shew our authority.

The teachers and pastors of the gospel-church are *elders*: and therefore we believe they are authorised to govern and bear rule. But we apprehend *others*, who are neither furnished with gifts to be public teachers, nor called to that work, are impowered to join with pastors and teachers, in every act of government and dis-

discipline: their office is principally to wait on *ruling*, and, on this account, they are called *ruling elders*.

I shall *first* endeavour to shew, that this opinion is *probable*; and *then* attempt a positive *proof* of it.

The probability of our opinion is supported by the following considerations laid together.

1. The church has, undoubtedly, an office of discipline and rule, distinct from that of teaching, Rom. xii. 7. 8. Heb. xiii. 7.

2. Different gifts are required to enable a man *to teach*, and *to rule*. The same talents, which shine in *one* of these offices, do not qualify a man for *the other*. Gifts to perform the duties prescribed, are the foundation of all the services and office-powers in the church: for 'unto every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ,' Eph. iv. 7. As, *in nature*, different capacities and inclinations are required in different employments; so, *in the church*, different gifts and graces, for executing different offices. And the person who fills *one* office with dignity and honour, would sometimes appear very awkward, if not contemptible, in *another*.

3. Though some are furnished with proper gifts for several duties; yet, in the wisdom of the Holy Ghost, distinct duties are made the ground of distinct church-offices, where one sort of them is as much as can be ordinarily attended to. Because the apostles could not fully attend to the ministry of the word, and the necessities of the poor, deacons were appointed to serve tables, Acts vi. 2. 3. 4.; though the institution of this office did not free the apostles from their obligation to take care of the poor, as they had opportunity, Gal. ii. 9. 10. Now, if the ministry of the word, privately and publicly, and the duties connected with that, be really as much as one order of men is sufficient for; it is a natural consequence, that the ends of authority and discipline must be fully obtained by an *assisting* eldership, set over that business. See Exod. xviii. 17.—23.

4. The complete form of every church requires *several elders*; at least *more than one*, Acts^{xiv}. 23. Tit. i. 5. What should be, in every church, the precise number cannot be exactly determined. As no office is appointed for pomp or show, but only for labour;
the

the number of elders must be proportioned to the largeness of the congregation. *As many* are necessary as may perform the work belonging to their office, which cannot be done by a *less number* than *two* or *three*. But it cannot be proved, that there must be *more than one teaching elder* in every congregation, without proving that all elders labour in the word and doctrine; which is the point in dispute.

5. All authoritative rule and government is committed unto elders: accordingly the apostle gives a solemn charge to the elders of the church of Ephesus, to be perseveringly diligent, in whatever belonged to the care, inspection, oversight, rule, and instruction, of that church, Acts xx. 17.—38. This charge was in no respect unconstitutional, and there was nothing singular in the case of that church, more than others. But we cannot suppose, that all this power is engrossed into the hand of the pastors and teachers; as will appear immediately.

When these things are viewed in one connection, our opinion, about ruling elders, will not seem to be so destitute of evidence, as to render it, in any degree *improbable*.

I shall now attempt to prove, that the office of ruling-elders is a *divine institution*. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. Accordingly I shall explain, and vindicate, the heavenly original of this office, from four passages which are well known, and generally urged in this argument; namely, Rom. xii. 6, 7, 8.—1 Cor. xii. 28.—1 Tim. v. 17.—and Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17. I shall begin with

Romans xii. 6, 7, 8. 'Having then gifts, differing according to the grace given to us; whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith: or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; HE THAT RULETH, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.'

In the eleventh chapter, our apostle had cleared up the sovereignty of divine grace in the salvation and recovery of ruined man, by an illustrious example of the wonderful benignity of God, in free vouchsafements of mercy and goodness to the Gentiles,

ties, on one hand; and of the strictest justice, in cutting off the Jewish nation, on the other. He improves this awful dispensation of goodness and severity, as an argument for steadfastness in the faith; for being devoted to, and heartily engaged in, the service of God; and for great humility and modesty in our thoughts of ourselves, and behaviour towards our brethren: 'I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith,' chap. xii. 3. To enforce this duty of thinking soberly of ourselves, and behaving modestly to others, it is added, 'That the saints, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.' In the human body there are many members; each member is endowed with its proper power, fitted to its peculiar place, and designed to serve a particular purpose; the eyes to see, the tongue to speak, the hands to work, the feet to walk, and the like. None of these members assumes the office, or envies the place of the rest. So it should be in the church, where Christians have spiritual gifts of various kinds; some having one kind, and others another, and *that* in different degrees, though all tending to the same ends, *viz.* the glory of God, and the edification of the church. These gifts furnish members for particular duties, and qualify them for particular offices, in the body of Christ. The reasoning has no force, propriety, or connection, if we suppose *one member* to be possessed, in an eminent degree, of *all the different gifts*, which our apostle mentions; or even if we allow *every individual member* to have such a share of *any one* of these gifts, as might enable him to sustain *that office*, and exercise *that gift*, to general edification. If this were the case, it would be absurd to compare the church to a body, Christians to the members of the body, or, their different and respective offices and stations, to the offices of the several members of the body; in a word, our apostle's nervous argument is hereby rendered the merest quibble, destitute of all sense, weight, or truth.

But if we consider the gospel-church, as a body; individual Christians as its members; and their different stations, as an-
swering

swering to the offices of these members, while each performs the function of its own place *only*; the connection is clear and striking; the reasoning is accurate and conclusive.

Here are so many offices which must be filled up; grace is given according to the measure of the gift of Christ for each of them; one is qualified for, and called to, *one*, and another, to *another* of these stations of honour and service; but none is eminently furnished for them all; therefore let these who have been regularly called to *prophecy*, prophecy according to the proportion of faith; and let these who are regularly called to *ministry*, wait on their ministry, *verf. 6, 7*. This general distribution of public offices into *prophefying* and *ministry* is resumed, and the parts of each are respectively opened in the close of the 7th, and whole of the 8th verse.

PROPHESYING includes the offices of him who *teacheth*, or *comforteth*, by applying the word of God to the conscience. * Let * him that teacheth, wait on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on * exhortation.*

MINISTRY [*Διακονία*] may be resolved into these officers:—he that giveth, or the deacon, who should do it with simplicity;—he that ruleth, or the ruling elder, who should do it with diligence;—and he that sheweth mercy, in visiting the sick, and them that are in bonds for the sake of Christ, who should do it with cheerfulness.

HE that ruleth, [*ὁ προϊστάμενος*], properly signifies one who presides over an affair; for example, over his conversation, by using all laudable endeavours, and the utmost care and diligence, to abound, excel, and lead the way to others, in all good works, Tit. iii. 8. 14.—over his family, in Christian government and œconomy, 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5, 12.—or, over the church, 1 Tim. v. 17. 1 Thess. v. 12. and in the verse under my consideration. These are all the places where the word is found in the oracles of God; and it is taken in a sense, which implies authority and power, in each of them, according to the nature of the thing to which it is applied. He that ruleth has a peculiar place, a peculiar service, and peculiar gifts to enable him to fill that place, and perform that service honourably and successfully. We are chiefly concerned

concerned to know what he ruleth over. Some tell us, it is *his family*; but this is quite foreign to our apostle's design, which is to inform and direct the church, in her public capacity:—others, with more probability, say, it is *the church-stock*; but, upon this supposition, *he that ruleth* is not a different member, has not a peculiar office in the body of Christ; he is the *same member*, and does the *same work*, as *he that giveth*. The consequence is unavoidable, if we understand *him that giveth* to be the deacon, which is generally allowed; but it is extremely injurious to the apostle's professed design, to imagine, he could intend any thing so much against the scope of his own argument, which is, to infer a variety of offices, from a diversity of gifts, and so to reconcile every one to think soberly of himself, and behave dutifully to his superiors, inferiors, and equals, in the fellowship of the gospel.

If *he that ruleth* is neither a description of a Christian head of a family, nor of him who is intrusted with the church-stock, he must be one that *ruleth* or *governeth* THE CHURCH.

To alledge that the apostle speaks of *gifts only*, not of *offices*, in this passage, is both *weak* and *groundless*. This insinuation will as much strike against the office of a *standing ministry*, and of *deacons*, as against the office of *rulers*: but *he that ruleth*, is one who possesses a gift for government, and acts in a character which is suitable to his gift. Gifts conferred on men, that they may be exercised for public usefulness, are represented in close connection with their corresponding offices; as we see Ephes. iv. 7. 8. 11.

But though we should grant, that the apostle is treating of gifts, and not of offices: must it not follow, that the *exercise* of church-government is not competent to ALL; since the gifts which qualify men for that employment, are given to *some only*? Do all teach? Do all exhort? Do all give? And why should we think that all rule?

I shall not trouble myself, or the reader, with some objections, still more trifling, against our sense of this text. Whoever has an opportunity, may consult the writings of the London ministers, of Calderwood, Owen, Rutherford, Gillespie, and others,

on the subject. I will now proceed to establish the warrant for the office of ruling elders, from

1 Cor. xiii. 28. 'God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.'

In the external administration of the affairs of the church, God placed various officers and offices, in it; some of them *extraordinary*, to plant churches, as the apostles, evangelists, workers of miracles, healers of bodily diseases, speakers of foreign languages by the immediate gift of God, and such like; and others of them *ordinary*, to build up, establish, and comfort her, as pastors, teachers, helpers, governors. This text specifies several offices and officers of both kinds. I might take a view of the passage which goes before these words, which contains a lively and striking description of the church, as compared to the human body. But this instructive and beautiful image has been already considered, and therefore I shall confine myself to a few observations on the text; such as,

1. The apostle is certainly giving a description of *men in office*; and not of *gifts only*.

2. These men God hath SET, in their respective offices; that is, hath given them their authority, and appointed them their place: no less is imported in the word [*ἰθαρο*] as it is used in *like cases*, Acts xiii. 47. and xx. 28. 2 Tim. i. 11.

3. These men are appointed to an office, which is purely *ecclesiastical*: God hath set them *in the church*.

4. The continuance of these ordinances must be determined by their nature, scope, and design. The end of all *extraordinary institutions* was completely answered, when Christianity had obtained an *undeniable and public testimony* to its divine original, and sublime excellency; and therefore they ceased of course: but these ordinances, which are connected with, and inseparable from, the being, comfort, and welfare, of the church; such as, instruction, government, and communicating to the necessities of the poor, must continue unchanged, while the dispensation lasts, whereunto they belong.

5. Government

5. Government is essentially necessary to society; and the ends of church-fellowship render it peculiarly necessary in the spiritual kingdom of Christ. If some enthusiasts have denied this; yet their *practice* has constantly rebelled against their chimerical *speculations*, and thereby contribute to establish the truth which they denied.

6. *GOVERNMENTS*, put for *governors*, in this text, as miracles, for *them* who work miracles, is but one of the many offices which God hath set in the church. Surely the exercise of this office cannot be common to all, since none of the rest of the offices is common to all, *verf.* 29, 30. Nay, the words contain an express limitation; God hath set *some*—governments; and the connection of the words with the apostle's scope is an unanswerable demonstration, that this character is descriptive of *one class only* of church-members, in distinction from the *whole*.

All that is further needful, is only to enquire what sort of governments, or governors, is meant. Ecclesiastical officers they are, to be sure; but it is not agreed, whether they are pastors, deacons, or ruling elders. There seems to be no good reason for explaining this character, as agreeing to *pastors only*, exclusive of all others; for they had been already described, as *teachers*, perhaps also as *prophets*. Nor is it reasonable to understand *deacons*, to be described by this designation: they are never called governors, [*κυβερνητοὶ*]. The word is a metaphor taken from pilots or shipmasters, who sit at the helm, and direct the course of the ship, who are called [*κυβερνηταὶ*] governors, or shipmasters, James iii. 4. Rev. xviii. 17. The deacon's office is neither to *feed* the flock, nor to *govern* the church, in her spiritual concerns, as will be shown in the 15th chapter; moreover, their office seems not to be forgot in this catalogue: they were originally appointed to *assist* the apostles, and *take care* of the poor, and therefore may fitly be called *helpers*; their office is to *help* both the teachers and the church. And it has an odd sound to say, God hath set some in the church to *govern*—what? not *her members*, but *her flock*. Deacons are set to *help* her indigent members; and *some* are likewise set to *govern* the principles and behaviour of her members.

Therefore these governments are church-rulers; who are *over their flock in the Lord*, for the exercise of discipline. It is of no great moment, how they are called: the contest is about *facts*, not about *names*.

The third text which I propose to explain and defend, in proof of this sacred office, is recorded

1 Tim. v. 17. 'Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.' I shall make a few remarks only to clear the sense of this passage, and then touch at some of the capital objections which are made against this explication.

That we may rightly apprehend the meaning of these words, it is proper to make the following observations.

1. The persons spoken of are *elders*. An essential part of their office is *to rule*; and it is competent to them *only*, to bear rule in the Christian church.

2. There are *elders* who both *rule*, and *labour in the word and doctrine*: therefore the Hebrews are called to remember them, who had had the rule over them, and had spoken to them the word of God, Heb. xiii. 7.

3. When *some* elders have *ruled well*, they *do* have their *whole duty*, and deserve double honour.

4. It is the *common duty* of all gospel-ministers, to labour [*κονισα*] with unwearied, persevering diligence, 1 Cor. iii. 8, and 1 Thess. v. 12. This is the very work and business of every ministering servant of Jesus Christ.

5. The elders who labour in the word and doctrine, are *authorised to rule* in common only, with *some other elders* who rule without *that labour*. And therefore,

6. The *superior respect*, challenged in favour of the elders who labour in the word and doctrine, must arise, *only and wholly*, from their office as *labourers*; not from any eminency in their office, as *rulers*. This remark is founded on the genuine sense, and constant use, of the word [*μαλιστα*] *especially*, which distinguishes one thing from another, in all the places where it is used in the New Testament; and at the same time intimates, *N. B.* That what follows is of the same kind, in a certain respect, with what went

went before. In this sense, it implies, that the elders, who only rule well, are worthy of double honour; especially these elders who do not only rule, but moreover labour in the word and doctrine, have a *particular right* to this double honour; because they are *labourers*, as well as *rulers*. The elders who labour, do also rule; but many who rule, do not labour.

Every engine has been employed against this text, to obscure and pervert its obvious sense, "which," Dr. Owen says, "is of uncontrollable evidence, if it had any thing, but prejudice and interest to conflict with." The very learned and laborious Calderwood reckons up and confutes ten different glosses upon it. (*Vide Altare Damascenarum*.) Disaffection to the truth which it asserts, has been the ground of many ingenious conjectures, about the sense of it.

Some have suggested, that *they who labour* are elders of *peculiar zeal and singular diligence*. But their character, as *labourers* [*οἱ κομιστῆς*], is a common description of gospel-ministers, as was observed already. See John iv. 38.

Others suppose, that [*οἱ ἡγουμένους*] they who rule well, are fixed pastors; and [*οἱ κομιστῆς*] they who labour in the word, are *itinerant or travelling preachers*. But the *fixed pastors* in Thessalonica were [*οἱ κηρύττοντες ἐν ὑμῖν*] them that laboured among them, 1 Thess. v. 12.

A third objection is grounded on the use of the participle in the Greek language, which often denotes the reason or condition of a thing, and is used to be resolved by a conjunction expressing that reason or condition. According to this criticism, which the very learned Mr. Joseph Mede adopts, the translation would run to this purpose; 'Let the elders that rule their flocks well be counted worthy of double honour, and that chiefly because of their labour in the word and doctrine.' Before this criticism can be allowed in the present case, it must be established by the authority of some Greek writers of good character, who use the participle with [*καλῶς*] especially joined to it, in this sense. Our argument rests principally on the connection which *that word* has in the verse. And to prove the absurdity of that translation, I beg leave to annex a quotation from

Herodian,

Herodian, *lib. ii.* [*φιλοστοι δε φουσι Συροι, μαλιστα δε την Ἀντιοχειαν κατοικοντες.*] “The Syrians are naturally lovers of festivals; but especially they that dwell at Antioch.” This is the plain, unforced sense of that place; but if we interpret it by this rule of criticism, it would run thus, “The Syrians are naturally lovers of festivals, and that chiefly because of their dwelling at Antioch!!!”

To evade the plain sense already given, some have fancied, that the *elders* who *rule* well are *deacons*, and they who *labour* in the word and doctrine are *pastors*. But where are deacons called *elders*?—or, where is it said, that their office is *to rule*?

If the *elders* who *rule* well are *diocesan bishops*, and they who *labour* in the word and doctrine, *ordinary teachers*; it will be a good inference, that the *last*, on a comparison with the *first*, are *especially* worthy of double honour.

Mr. Mede has favoured the world with a new improvement on the text. He thinks the *elders* that *rule* well are *inferior civil magistrates*; and the *elders* that *labour* in the word are *gospel-ministers*. The *elder* is mentioned also in the 1st, and 19th verses of the chapter, (besides what is likewise mentioned of [*πρεσβυτερας*] *elder women* in the second): and *presbytery* or *eldership*, in chap. iii. 14. I hope that very learned author will not be supposed, to have explained all these of civil magistrates, or that Timothy had a gift given him by the laying on of the hands of a *bench of acting justices*. I am sorry to speak in a ludicrous strain, of a writer who was an honour to his country, and whose memory will be precious to every friend of learning and useful knowledge; but every one must see, that the worthy author's whim, is not only unsupported, but contradicted by the context.

The last text I shall urge is recorded,

Matth. xviii. 15. 16. 17. ‘Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him

‘him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.’ These words contain a full and plain direction, how to deal with *offending members*, in order to *recover* them, or, if they remain *obstinate*, to *cast them out* of the fellowship of the church. The expressions made use of are undeniably taken from the Jewish dispensation. The effect of an unsuccessful process with the offender, is laid down thus, ‘Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.’ It is very plain these words are allusive to the light, in which the Jews considered the *nations* around them, that were aliens from the privileges of their commonwealth; and the Roman *tax-gatherers*, who were hated because they were covetous imposers, but chiefly because their office was a standing proof of the bondage and enslaved condition to which the Jews were then reduced as a Roman province. Except we explain it in this way, we shall be at a loss to understand the sense or propriety of what is said. And as the Jewish constitution must furnish a key to the sense of the sentence to be past; so the court which is to hear the cause, and give the judgment, namely, *the church*, must be explained by that same rule. I could produce abundance of places from the Old Testament, where the congregation [עדה] are said to have done that, which was done by their elders only, [זקנים] I shall quote two or three only; Numb. xxxv. 24: speaking of the manslayer, it is said, ‘The congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood:’ compare Deut. xix. 12. ‘The elders of his city shall send and fetch him,’ that is, the convicted murderer, who had fled to the city of refuge.—Josh. xx. 4. ‘The manslayer that flieth unto one of the cities of refuge,—shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city:’ compare vers. 6. ‘He shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment.’—Exod. xii. 3. ‘Speak unto all the congregation of Israel;’ compare vers. 21. ‘Moses called for all the elders of Israel.’

In all these instances, the *congregation* must be explained of the *eldership*; and the word [עדה] congregation, which is there used, is rendered by the Seventy Interpreters [ἐκκλησία] church, the very same word which our Lord has used Matth. xviii. 17. And these

these Interpreters render that Hebrew word by this Greek word in many places where it must be understood *only*, of persons who are in office and have no authority; as in 1 Chron. xiii. 2. 4. and xxix. 1. 2 Chron. i. 3. and many other places. Now, if the word [*ἐκκλησία*] church was understood in this sense in the Jewish law, to which our Lord refers, it is but reasonable to understand it in this sense, as it is used in the text under consideration. Christ spake in a dialect which was very intelligible to the Jews, and has left to be observed in the New Testament church, a rule which was to derive light from their institutions and practice.

It cannot be thought absurd, to go to the Old Testament church, to find the precise meaning of *such institutions* for the order and government of the church under the New, as are couched in the language, and refer to the constitution-principles of that dispensation. Moreover, we assert, (1.) That the Christian church has every thing which contributes to render society useful and agreeable, in common with civil societies. (2.) Every Jewish appointment, which was not immediately subservient to the shadows of the Mosaic law, but to the preservation of social order, and the promoting of public good,—is an unrepealed ordinance; because its end is never *fully* gained, therefore its obligation can never be superseded. (3.) The exercise of authority in a church by *some*, who rule over others, is an ordinance of this nature. And, (4.) Though our Lord is primarily giving a rule to *one congregation*; yet not exclusive of the more extended sense of the word *Church*; as we shall have occasion to shew on the 13th chapter.

These are *some* of the principles which demonstrate the *scriptural warrant* for the office of *ruling elders*. They encourage us to maintain and defend it, against all the bold efforts of zealous pens to run it down, under a pretence of *novelty* and *singularity*. Do they appeal to antiquity? We are willing to risk the credit of our cause at this tribunal: because we are sure it was the doctrine and practice of the primitive church, and the most eminent fathers. Tertullian, Ambrose, Origin, Basil, Optatus, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory the great, with many others might be quoted;

quoted ; not to confirm our faith, but to silence our opposers. And I cannot help expressing my surprise, at the illiberal abuse of this office, by the casuists for prelacy ; who urge the Jewish pontificate, which the apostle demonstrates to have been a perishing shadow, as a good argument for diocesan episcopacy ; and yet cannot allow the Jewish elderships, which were for government *only*, to be a necessary standing office ; only with such alterations, as the difference of Christian from the Jewish church demands.

Which ever way we cast our eyes, we either find this ordinance actually observed, or a mimic form of it substituted in the room of Heaven's appointment. Not in the church of Rome only, but wherever prelacy is established, the government of the church is commonly managed by *chancellors, officials, commissaries, church-wardens*, and the *like* officers, who are absolutely *laymen*, and not, in their own estimation, teachers. And Bp. Burnet and Dr. South have openly and roundly said, that a bishop has *no* charge of souls ; and therefore a teaching talent is not absolutely necessary in him, nor is of the vital constitution of his function. They were of opinion, that bishops by office, are called to *rule only*, not to *teach*. And in the independent churches, we find, that, in fact, *a few* exercise the power of government, either in virtue of a trust in confidence, or an assumed power. The ordinances of God are supremely excellent, consistent, and complete.

C H A P. XII.

The Qualifications, Call, and Office-duties of ruling Elders.

A RESPECTABLE eminence in *all* the *essential* characters of a *good ruler*, should distinguish and adorn this elder. I shall have occasion to mention and explain these characters, when I come to the 17th chapter. To avoid every thing that will more naturally fall in there ; I shall only observe, at present, that *piety, capacity, and conduct*, are the *leading qualifications* of a ruling elder.

PIETY is necessary to make them zealous, disinterested, and useful, ruling in the fear of God. Christians joined together in

K

the

the faith, order, and fellowship of the gospel, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house. The design of all gospel-institutions, relative to the government of this house, is to prevent sin, and to promote holy tempers, and purity of conversation; that *all* may be to the glory of the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, and teacheth to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Therefore, to add force and dignity to their admonitions, reproofs, counsels, and government, it is necessary they be 'examples of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity,' 1 Tim. iv. 12.; that they be 'purged from iniquity, vessels unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work; following righteousness, faith, charity, and peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart,' 2 Tim. ii. 21. 22.

CAPACITY is likewise necessary, to enable them who govern the church, to know how to behave in the house of God, and how to direct the behaviour of the church. Like the men of Issachar, they should have understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, 1 Chron. xii. 32. Moses spake like a reasonable man, when he said to Israel, 'Take ye wise men and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you,' Deut. i. 13. A ruler must know the constitution of that government wherein he acts; must be able to detect the artful practices of designing men, who would pervert judgment, and disguise truth; and must consider, with prudent caution, what is most edifying in particular cases. That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; for the foolishness of man perverteth his way: but the ruler in church or state, who wanteth understanding is a great oppressor. Solomon's prayer, when the Lord appeared to him at Gibeon, and said unto him, 'Ask what I shall give thee,' was, 'Give thy servant an understanding heart, to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing,' 1 Kings iii. 5. 6. 7.—15. That Spirit of the Lord which rested on Christ, as the spirit of wisdom,

wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and made him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, that with righteousness he might judge the poor, and reprove with equity, for the meek of the earth, Is. xi. 2. 3. 4. 5.—must rest upon *all* who are *set to rule for him* in the church: as the spirit which was on Moses, was given to the chosen rulers of Israel, Numb. xi. 16. 17.

UPRIGHT conduct is a necessary and recommending part of a ruling elder's character. He must be blameless, as the steward of God; not accused of riot; he must have a good report of them that are without; sober; of good behaviour; given to hospitality; patient; a lover of good men; impartial; just; cautious; and, in one word, he must be such as he would wish to see the flock, exemplifying in his conduct all that is praiseworthy, and adding weight to his censures on all appearances of evil, by purging himself from all dishonourable and sinful attachments. He should behave himself wisely in a perfect way, and walk within his house with a perfect heart.

These are the qualifications of ruling elders; namely, piety, capacity, and conduct, all joined closely and inseparably together.

The call of ruling elders, like the call of the elders who labour in the word and doctrine, consists in two things, viz. *election* and *ordination*. The reader may find all that is necessary to be remarked on either of them, chap. x. sect. 2. Their election should be *popular*, and their ordination *judicial*, and performed with laying on of hands.

The office-duties belonging to their province, are all summed up in their *ruling well*, or *ruling with diligence*. The power of making laws, for the government of the church, is the incommunicable prerogative of her glorious Head. Her rulers cannot safely, or consistent with their duty, go beyond the word of the Lord. The authority, which he hath given them for the edification of his body, consisteth in *making a due application of his laws to persons, cases, and occasions*. The ruling elders are joined to teachers, and have the *same authority* with them, in *all acts and duties of church power*, for her rule and government; and accordingly determine by their *common suffrage*, every vote having

an *equal* weight. In order to apprehend the proper extent of their office-powers, it is necessary to come to particulars, and shew what are the acts of church-government which belong to her rulers, by the authority of her blessed Head. And,

1. Though they may not *make, impose, or receive any* imposed *doctrines*, which are not contained in the word of God; it is their duty to judge of the agreeableness of every doctrine to the oracles of God, and declare what seems good to the Holy Ghost and to them, on every point of truth and error, sin and duty, Acts xv. 2, 28. 29. and xvi. 4. To this purpose, we find the church of Ephesus commended, for having tried them who said they were apostles and were not, but did lie, Rev. ii. 2. compared with Acts xx. 17.—31.

2. It belongs to elders, in the exercise of their office, to admit members into their fellowship, upon a visible evidence of their being qualified as the scriptures direct. Unto them God hath given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to open the door of admission, unto these whom God hath received, Matth. xvi. 19.

3. Another branch of their office is, to direct and encourage church-members, to observe the law of Christ, that they may shew forth his glory, and promote their mutual edification, by walking in love, following holiness, and being useful to one another. These duties tend greatly to advance the comfort, and obtain the ends of their union as a church; and are honoured with particular marks of the care of God to cultivate and improve them, Heb. xiii. 7. 17.

4. It belongs to the elders of the church to take care and provide, that all the institutions of Jesus Christ be duly observed, and kept pure and entire. These are a sacred trust committed to their charge; and it is required of them, as stewards, that they be *faithful*. God hath set governments in his church, that they may rule for him, walking in all his ordinances themselves, and recommending them to the flock; for God hath made them the keepers of his vineyard, Song i. 6. and viii. 11. 12.

5. They are set to watch over the conversation of their brethren, and to instruct, admonish, exhort, rebuke, and comfort, as they see cause. This is a considerable branch of their duty, and

and ought to be attended to with peculiar courage and diligence, that they may know well the state of their flocks, and may separate between the precious and the vile.

6. It is a solemn part of their work to visit the sick, especially those whose outward or inward distresses expose them to more than ordinary sufferings; such as the *poor*, the *afflicted*, or the *tempted*. This is a work of mercy, and a moral duty; but is expressly provided for by the wisdom and good-will of Christ, that his people's comfort may be more full. 'Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him,' Jam. v. 14.

7. They should be assisting to the pastor in watching over and directing the flock; and advise with the deacons concerning the relief of the poor. The liberal contributions at Antiöch for the brethren who dwelt in Judea, were sent by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, unto the elders in Judea, Acts xi. 27.—30.

8. The external regulations of the church, in every thing belonging to decency and order, according to the general rules of the word, belong immediately to the elder's province; as well as the appointment of the seasons for extraordinary duties of fasting, thanksgiving, and the like, in the congregation, or church. These are certainly acts of government, and the right of exercising them must reside in the elders of the church, who have the oversight in all its concerns of that kind. And,

9. To them it belongs, in virtue of their office, to sit in judgment upon offenders, to take the proof, to weigh the evidence, and determine accordingly, justifying the innocent, and censuring the convicted brother, according to the nature of his offence, Matth. xviii. 15.—17. 18.

I shall conclude this chapter with the words of a very eminent and candid writer: "Truly, *says he*, if there were no such office mentioned in the scripture, we might reasonably wish for such a one,—it being so useful and serviceable to the great purposes of religion. What can be more desirable, than that there should be one or more appointed to observe the conversation of the flock, in order to the exercising of discipline? The pastor himself cannot be supposed to have an eye
"on

“on every one of his charge; and therefore, it is fitting that out
 “of those who are fellow-members, and daily converse one with
 “another, and therefore are capable of acquainting themselves
 “with their manners and behaviour, there should be chosen
 “these elders I am speaking of, to inspect the carriage and de-
 “portment of the flock, and to report it to the pastor and the
 “assembly,—if it be required.” Edward’s *Theologia Reformata*,
 vol. i. p. 528.

C H A P. XIII.

*The original Constitution of the Apostolic Churches lodged all the Exer-
 cise of their government, in the hands of these two classes of Elders
 acting unitedly, with equal authority, in subordinate courts.*

INDEPENDENTS are not of one mind about the warrantable-
 ness and divine right of ruling elders. Some of them defend
 and others deny it. But even these who allow it, confine the exer-
 cise of church-government wholly to a particular congregation,
 and absolutely deny courts of review, in any superior jurisdiction.
 Their sentiments are expressed by Dr. Chauncy in the following
 words: “In cases of difficulties and differences arising in
 “churches, many churches, holding communion together, may,
 “by their elders and messengers, meet together, to consult and
 “advise about the said matters, and report to the respective
 “churches. Howbeit these assemblies, as such, are not trusted
 “with any coercive power, or jurisdiction, over the churches,
 “to impose their determinations on them, or their officers. Be-
 “sides these occasional assemblies and councils, there are not in-
 “stituted by Christ any synods, in a fixed combination of churches
 “or officers, in lesser or greater assemblies; nor are there any
 “synods appointed by Christ, by way of subordination to one
 “another.” *Vide Divine Institution of Congregational Churches*, p. 136.

Presbyterians maintain, on the other hand, “That it is law-
 “ful, and agreeable to the word of God, that the church be go-
 “verned by several sorts of assemblies, which are congregational,
 “classical, and synodical; and that there be a subordination of
 “these assemblies to one another.” See *The form of Presbyterial
 Church-government*, agreed upon by the assembly of divines at
 Westminster, anno 1644.

In this controversy all parties are agreed, to submit their cause to the decision of the Holy Ghost, speaking in the scriptures, and to abide by his verdict.

When the God of glory had appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, and afterwards gave him the covenant of circumcision, he established his covenant with *his family*, and owned it as *his church*: he called his covenant-seed in the line of Isaac; and to manifest the sovereignty of his favour, he afterwards rejected Esau the first-born, and loved Jacob the younger of his twin-children; and then confirmed his covenant with his twelve sons, whom he made the heads of so many tribes, and multiplied their seed as the stars of heaven, and the sand of the sea. Still the *church* was preserved in the covenant-line, though confined to a *single family* for three generations; in so much that all the souls of the house of Jacob, when he came into Egypt, were only threescore and ten, about two hundred and twenty years after the calling of Abraham. But in two hundred and ten years more, the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot, that were men, besides children, Exod. xii. 40, 41. And though they were then mustered in tribes, Psal. cv. 37. yet still they were but *one church*, Acts vii. 38. And as they were *one congregation* only, or *church*, while they sojourned in the wilderness; they are never reckoned more than *one congregation*, or *church* [ἑνὴν ἐκκλησίαν], after they became possessors of the land of Canaan; not even in the days of Solomon, when all the blessings of peace and plenty were singularly multiplied, and the number of the children of Israel probably as great as ever it was in any period. This is the opinion not of Presbyterians only, but of Independents, who constantly affirm, that the Jews were a *congregational church*. See Chauncy's Divine Institution of Congregational Churches, p. 28. —30. The same author, in another place, says, "A visible church is a *single stated assembly* of a competent number, to support ordinances among them, and OF NO MORE than can conveniently meet together IN ONE PLACE." See his Doctrine according to Godliness, p. 294. But it is plain, the children of Israel were *not*, in this sense, a *congregational church*; for even in the

the

the days of old, they had synagogues throughout their land, and, no doubt, rulers, as well as teachers, in each of them, Psal. lxxiv. 8. compared with Acts xiii. 15.

Some of the conclusions which appear to be more natural from this account of the congregation of the Jews, are these:—That the *same church* may consist of *very few*, or *very many members*, without any difference in the *nature* or *principles* of her constitution:—That it is merely *accidental* to *one church* to meet, for the stated duties of public worship, in *one place*, or in *several places*; and, therefore, though the people of God may hold their meetings for divine service, in *several places* at the *same time*, and observe in each of them, all the stated duties of religious worship: they may, notwithstanding, constitute only *one church*, according to the genuine scripture-sense of that phrase.

The division of particular congregations, which are in one communion of faith and obedience, is founded wholly on maxims of prudence, which have a common influence to direct to rational measures, in every society, civil or sacred. A division of this kind, which is owing perhaps to an increase of the members to a number too many to meet in one place, necessarily supposes such an *intimate and important union*, which cannot be *dissolved* by any circumstance of *so trifling and low* a nature, as that of meeting in different places to attend the same religious services, and pursue the same grand designs. In two such congregations, or we may as well suppose three, or four, or as many as we please, the great ends of edification and comfort must be pursued in a congregational connection in each of them. The great changes in the radical church, as to the number of her members, make it necessary, that she undergo changes, in the same proportion, with respect to the number and particular provinces of her office-bearers. But it does not follow, that this enlargement of their number of members and office-bearers, with the prudent parcelling of them into convenient divisions, for their greater edification, will disunite them, and totally set aside their mutual dependance upon, and relation to, one another, as so many parts of the *same church*.

A church which is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets,

prophets, though it should consist only of *one* worshipping assembly, has the full power of discipline within itself;—but then, unless it can be ascertained by what precise number a gospel-church must be circumscribed,—the same power must remain in the *whole* body, though it be extended to an *hundred*, or even a *thousand* worshipping assemblies.

Perhaps *this state* of the church may be illustrated, by *that* of mankind, in the earliest ages, and downwards. It is easy to conceive of the whole human race, not yet formed into separate families,—as constituting only *one* small society, wherein their common duty and interest engaged every individual to fulfil the services of his station and relation. We may suppose, that the views of mutual comfort would make them active and cheerful in the zealous performance of the duties belonging to every relation.—but the increase of men upon earth soon rendered it necessary to multiply families, and establish order and government in each of them, whereby every circumstance of family-æconomy should be set up, and strictly observed; each family being a law unto itself. Now, as each of these families must co-operate to the *common good* of mankind, as their *general end*, they must all be under some proper regulations, to direct their united endeavours to obtain this valuable object. They were, no doubt, satisfied from obvious reflections, or, at least, must have soon learned from fatal experience, that all their distributions, into multiplied societies, and separate families, should never derogate from, and was never intended to supersede, their inviolable union, as *one body of people*, united under one head and governing direction. Nature had fixed them in very close relations, being parents or children, brothers or sisters. Their changed circumstances could not dissolve these important connections, and no doubt made them more forward to comply with their duty in forming a plan of general comprehension, while duty, interest, and affection conspired to promote this reasonable and necessary measure.

This is not an imaginary, unsupported fiction, about the *general union of mankind*: for wherever civilized manners and good order have banished barbarism and confusion, all nations have agreed upon some maxims, commonly called *the laws of*

nations, which unite the world in one universal empire. Every kingdom, and all its interests, are considered, in this catholic comprehension, as an individual part of the general system : and these received maxims are a *law* to the *whole*.

This is confessedly the case in the history of mankind ; and may serve to throw some light on the constitution and government of the gospel-church, when we have made necessary allowances.

Let us now survey the account of the *rise, progress, and order* of the New-Testament church, which is contained in the apostolic writings, to see whether these things are so or not.

The Christian church was not formed before, because she was founded upon the resurrection of her blessed Head. Till this memorable event, the ceremonial law retained its full force, and received every mark of honourable respect from our Lord and his disciples, by a cheerful, constant, and exact regard to every rite. They were never unconnected with the Jewish church, till the death and resurrection of Christ had fulfilled, abolished, and taken away, that system of carnal ordinances, that he might establish in its room, a spiritual dispensation, full of grace and truth. Then he appeared to his disciples, and told them, that all power was given to him in heaven and in earth. ‘Go ye therefore, *be added*, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost : teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you : and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,’ Matth. xxviii. 18, 19, 20. To the apostles, whom he had chosen, he shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, Acts i. 3. So that we must fix the æra of her history to this period. And the facts which explain her constitution and order, must be dated from the baptizing of the disciples with the Holy Ghost ; that fulfilment of the promise of the Father, which they heard of Christ, Acts i. 4, 5. This is the beginning of her history : and oh ! how striking, grand, marvellous, and thick are the incidents ! They quite surprise us. Unable to forbear,

bear, we are obliged to cry out "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!"—On the day of Pentecost, which the God of Israel had separated for a solemn day, and for peculiar services, the disciples, at that time a very small handful, were, with a great many more, assembled with one accord in one place; it matters not where, for God no longer claimed peculiar interest in a house made with the hands of man:—the Holy Ghost, sent by the exalted Saviour, is poured out: gifts of speaking and understanding tongues are conferred: Peter, who lately disowned, denied, and with imprecations of a piece with the language of a profane Jew, refused that he knew his Lord, with all boldness opens his mouth, in obedience to his Master's instructions, and honestly declares the true intent of the extraordinary phenomena, which so much surprised the astonished beholders and hearers. After stating the prophecy in Joel, he leaves themselves to judge whether there was more or less in the memorable transactions of that solemn day, than might be reasonably expected from that prophetic intimation. He goes on next to preach Jesus crucified and risen, applying his doctrine for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness; and while he speaks, the spirit gives testimony to the word, and many believe, and turn to the Lord. They that gladly receive the word, profess their faith, and receive baptism, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which they had, being yet unbaptised. These continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. Fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. They that believed were together, and the Lord added to the church *daily* such as should be saved. From 120, we read that the number in a very short time increased to about 5000, Acts iv. 4. who were all men, not including in this list the number of the women; and as some commentators, of good note, think, even exclusive of the 3000 converts on the day of Pentecost, as well as all others; being themselves entirely new converts at one time. How mightily did the word of the Lord grow and prevail, when his Spirit was poured out from on high? Envy soon excited the

fury of the Pharisees and rulers of the Jews, and stimulated them to all the severities they durst attempt, consistent with any policy. But late experience demonstrated their folly, and that these measures could no more extirpate Christianity, than Pharaoh's sanguinary laws could destroy God's covenant-people. Indeed the effect was the same in both; the more they were afflicted, the more they grew. In so much that, besides the devout Greeks dwelling at Jerusalem, and besides the more established Jewish converts, there came to be several myriads or ten thousands of Jewish Christians at one time, who were through infirmity zealous of the law, Acts xxi. 20. Yet all this vast number of Christians, who, in the nature of things, could never assemble under one roof, for all the stated order of fellowship and service, in which they continued stedfastly, are never called [*αἱ ἐκκλησίαι*] churches, though we have at least nine instances of their being called [*ἡ ἐκκλησία*] a church; and twice we read of [*ὅλη ἡ ἐκκλησία*] the whole church. We have seen just now, how the Christian church was planted; how proselytes were gained by conviction of the truth of the gospel; how these that believed received the mark of discipleship by baptism; how closely they were joined together by continuing in the apostles doctrine and fellowship; how they were of one heart and of one mind; how they grew in numbers, yet without any neglect or relaxation of discipline; how their places of assembling must become numerous, that their accommodations might be convenient. From all this it may be inferred, that stated guides were necessary to teach and rule in distinct separate congregations: and accordingly we are in many places informed of a number of teachers and elders who usually ministered in that one city, Acts xi. 30. and xxi. 18, &c. Notwithstanding this, so close was their fellowship, that they never imagined themselves so many churches as they were congregations; nor are they ever so called. This is a circumstance which demands attention; and if it be founded in the very constitution of the church, which is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, we need not wonder to behold the propriety of beginning the building at Jerusalem, according to this order: for God began this edifice on the same plan according to which it shall be completed.

From all this it will appear, that there was a congregational discipline in every several congregation; a discipline exercised by their respective pastors and ruling elders, in distinction from the body of the people who were governed. But there was also a court composed of the elders which had the rule over these congregations, to which all the jurisdictions in the several congregations were *subordinate*. Two things may be offered for the proof of this.

1. It is strongly hinted in these texts before cited, Acts xi. 30. The Christians at Antioch sent their contributions to *the elders* at Jerusalem, by the hands of Barnabas and Saul: not to the elders of one congregation; but of the whole church.—Chap. xxi. 18. “The day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.”

2. All the Christians in Jerusalem were but *one church*, as I have already observed, and therefore they had but *one government and ruling power*, which was acknowledged by *every congregation*. It is universally allowed, that the characters of *one church* are—the same doctrine, the same sacraments, the same hope, the same faith, the same body, the same Spirit, the same Head, the *same government*, and the *same rulers*. The most sensible writers in the cause of Prelacy, Popery, Independency, and Presbytery, have cordially agreed in this principle; and it follows, that all who stand in such a connection, are inviolably bound to *hear* that church of which they are members, for so has our blessed Lord commanded, Matth. xviii. 17. And if it be evident, from what has been already said, that there must have been *more congregations* for stated worship at Jerusalem than *one*; it will also follow, that all the members belonging to each of them, were obliged to *hear the same elders*, constituted in a capacity which had an *equal respect* to each congregation. I would not contend about *names*; but there seems to be no impropriety in calling *this court*, a *classical presbytery*. The sum of what we plead is, that there was *such* a government settled and exercised in the church of Jerusalem, as extended to all the congregations of Christians in and about that city, as much as the power of any of these congregational elderships did to all the individuals in their division; be-
cause

cause without doubt there was *a church*, and but *one* church they were to *bear*; and on all sides it is granted, that the members of one congregation are not called immediately to *bear* the elder-ship in a *neighbouring* one; and therefore there was some *common council*, in which, as occasion required, elders from all the several congregations assembled to determine and decree judicially, in whatever was of general concern for their edification and comfort. *

After this necessary interruption, I return to survey further the sacred history of the Christian church, after it was planted at Jerusalem, by the ministry of the apostles, under the direction of their blessed Lord, Luke xxiv. 47. Being persecuted in one city, they were directed to flee into another, Matth. x. 23. And, accordingly, in adorable providence, the malice of adversaries subserved the spread of the gospel, from Jerusalem into all nations, Acts viii. 1. and xi. 19. The gospel preached to the nations, for the obedience of faith, was attended with much good fruit, in its victorious power over the worldly prejudices, and interests of multitudes, that were converted by it, and came to be reckoned to the Lord for a generation. Where the gospel was received, churches were planted, and the order of the house of the Son of God set up, Acts xiv. 23. The order which is in Christ was established among them, in whatever concerned the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline. They obtained the name of a church or churches, from the nature of their connections, which formed them into as many churches, as there were classical departments. That this was actually the case, is evident from one single consideration: in not a few churches, we are sure there were several congregations, which had their respective officers

* Mr. Glas was so well satisfied with the propriety and force of this reasoning, that he asserts the cause of independency on this *precarious* principle, that the church-members at Jerusalem assembled statelily in *some one place*. A supposition highly improbable, nay, demonstratively false! See Ayton's *Original Constitution of the Christian Church*, p. 204.—244. Where the reader will find the proofs which Mr. Glas adduces from Acts ii. 44. 46.—and iv. 3. 31.—and v. 12. 13.—and vi. 1.—6, fully answered.

and ordinances, and which constituted only one church. We have already seen, that this was in fact the case at Jerusalem, and shall now examine an instance or two more, *viz.* the churches of Antioch and Ephesus. In the mouth of two or three witnesses, unexceptionably competent, shall every word be established.

I begin with the church at Antioch; it was made up chiefly and originally of Grecians who were obedient to the faith. The planting of it is particularly described in Acts xi. 19. 20. 21.; and the following part of that chapter gives us an account of some remarkable waterings, first by Barnabas alone, then by him and Saul together, and last of all by certain prophets who came from Jerusalem. Two or three remarks on this history are all that is necessary to my purpose.

1. The churches had yet no convenient houses built for their worship, and therefore used private houses for the purposes of religious worship.

2. The number of the disciples at Antioch was very great. By the ministry of the men from Cyrene and Cyprus and others, a great number believed, and turned to the Lord, Acts xi. 21. By the labours of Barnabas, much people was added to the Lord, Acts xi. 24. Barnabas and Saul for a whole year taught much people there, Acts xi. 26. The disciples pre-admonished of a great dearth to be throughout all the world, contributed for the relief of many myriads of their brethren who dwelt in Judea, Acts xi. 28.—30. Certainly their number could not be small.

3. Ministering pastors and elders were numerous in that church. We learn that at one time, the men of Cyprus and Cyrene laboured with Barnabas and Saul, to whom were soon added prophets from Jerusalem, Acts xi. 19.—30. We are informed that at another time, there were in that church certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, Acts xiii. 1. where it is intimated, that there were a great many other teachers in that church, besides these particularly named, and it is expressly said so, Acts xv. 35.

Permit me on the whole to ask, Whether it is reasonable to suppose,

suppose, that all these multitudes could meet in one place? and whether, at that period, when the harvest was so vastly great, and the labourers so very few, such a superfluous expence of labour could be justified, if we suppose that so many ministered to one assembly only? But if we admit there were several congregational assemblies, and that all things pertaining to their æconomy and edification, were done decently and in order; it will follow of course, that these congregations must have an order suitable to their nature; that is, each must have an authoritative rule in itself. But that all these several congregations were united in one classical division, is the point still in dispute. The argument on the Presbyterian side proceeds on all the same grounds, as in the instance of the church at Jerusalem. One proof is taken, as in that case, from the original union of these congregations; and the little circumstance of disjoining them, on prudential causes, can never be supposed to affect that original union. A second proof is drawn from the strong hints suggested, concerning the *interests of the elders* in their *church-managements*; particularly, in that solemn service of separating men to the Holy Ghost, for the work of the ministry, Acts xiii. 1. 2. 3. A third argument seems to arise from these Christians being, at least, four times denominated a church, [*ἡ ἐκκλησία*], but never churches, [*αἱ ἐκκλησίαι*]; and if only *one church*, then but *one rule* or government, which *all concerned* were bound to reverence in the Lord. But having already attempted to open the force of these arguments, I need not repeat them. They must have the *same* weight in all *like* cases.

I shall now proceed to open the argument for classical jurisdiction, which is drawn from the constitution and order of the Ephesian church. It is set in a clear, strong, and advantageous light, in the assembly's form of Presbyterial church-government, where it stands thus:

“ 1. That there were more congregations than one in the “ church of Ephesus, appears by Acts xx. 31.* where is mention

* Acts xx. 31. Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

“ of Paul’s continuance at Ephesus in preaching for the space
 “ of three years ; and Acts. xix. 18. 19. 20. where the spiritual
 “ effect of the word is mentioned * ; and vers. 10. and 17. of
 “ the same chapter, where is a distinction of Jews and Greeks † :
 “ and 1 Cor. xvi. 8. and 9. where is a reason of Paul’s stay at
 “ Ephesus until Pentecost ‡ ; and vers. 19. where is mention of
 “ a particular church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla then
 “ at Ephesus, § as appears, Acts. xviii. 19. 24. 26. || All which
 “ laid together doth prove, that the multitudes of believers
 “ did make more congregations than one in the church of
 “ Ephesus.

“ 2. That there were many elders over these many congrega-
 “ tions, as one flock, appeareth. ¶

“ 3. That

* Acts xix. 18. And many that believed, came and confessed and shewed their deeds. Vers. 19. Many also of them which used curious arts, brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. Vers. 20. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

† Acts xix. 10. And this continued by the space of two years: so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. Vers. 17. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus, and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

‡ 1 Cor. xvi. 8. But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. Vers. 9. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

§ 1 Cor. xvi. 19. The churches of Asia salute you, Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

|| Acts xviii. 19. And he came to Ephesus and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. Vers. 24. And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. Vers. 26. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue, whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

¶ Acts xx. 17. And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. Vers. 25. And now behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Vers. 28. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. Vers. 30. Also of your own selves shall

“3. That these many congregations were one church, and that they were under one presbyterial government, appeareth.*

These reasons seem to justify the Presbyterian scheme of church-government, by elderships *only*, exercising their power in *subordinate judicatories*.—They shew its *divine right*, and conformity to the holy scriptures; at least, they demonstrate with a convincing evidence, that the scripture-notion of a *gospel-church* is not so confined, as some would make us believe, who say, “*It only signifies a single stated assembly of a competent number to support ordinances among them, and of no more than can conveniently meet together for edifying communion in one place.*” It may be taken in this sense, but *must not* be confined to such a sense: because we read of the church of Jerusalem, the church of Antioch, and the church of Ephesus, not to mention others,—which were too numerous to meet in one place for the stated services of public worship. The controversy between Independents and Presbyterians hinges *chiefly* on this *single point*; and it is submitted to impartial consideration, whether the inspired volumes are not expressly decisive on the dispute. *Authority* is essential to a church; and *one* and the *same* government must rule *one* and the *same* church. If, therefore, we find *several organized congregations* of Christians continually called *one church*; it must

men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Verf. 36. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. Verf. 37. And they all wept fore, and fell upon Paul's neck, and kissed him.

* Rev. ii. 1. Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; verf. 2. I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not; and hast found them liars: verf. 3. And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Verf. 4. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Verf. 5. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. Verf. 6. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Joined with Acts xx. 17. 28. See note marked thus ¶. p. 81.

follow,

follow, that there is doubtless *some one character*, wherein the elderships of all these congregations exercise discipline conjunctly: *a character*, which bears the same relation to each of these congregations, and, consequently, must be *superior* to the power of the eldership in any one of them; which is commonly called a *presbytery*. All parties own, that the *rulers* of one congregation cannot *govern another*, without being impowered for that purpose. And since they cannot be elders in two congregations at the same time, the elders, belonging to the several congregations which constitute the church, must govern the whole, not as *rulers* of any one congregation, but as a *classical presbytery*, which is *superior* to the congregational government established in every lower form and connection.

The objections made in favour of Prelacy, that each of these churches was governed by one diocesan bishop, are confuted by one single fact; namely, that the affairs of these churches were never managed by one *chief* or ruler [*ὁ ἀρχων*], nor even by a *president* [*ὁ πρεσβυτης*]; but always by *elders* in conjunction.

I would further observe on this argument,—that several churches, formed under a classical presbytery, which hold the same faith, and walk in the same order, may associate together, as a *court of review*, to judge of what may regularly come before them, by *reference* or *appeal*, from any of these churches. We have an example of this in the xvth chap. of the Acts of the apostles.

The Rev. Mr. Muir of Paisley has lately obliged the public with a most valuable sermon * on this subject, which sets the argument in a strong, natural, and striking light. None who knows the merit of that very sensible discourse, will allow himself to be without it. He has largely stated the argument, and yet, upon an attentive perusal, nothing will appear superfluous. I beg leave to give the heads of his argument, with so much of the illustrations as are necessary to confirm my hypothesis.

1. At Antioch, whence this cause came, there was a church;

* It has the following title.—*The Synod of Jerusalem; or, Courts of Review in the Christian Church considered.*—Preached at the opening of the synod of Glasgow and Ayr, at Irvine, Oct. 13. 1767.

for when Paul and Barnabas came thither,—they gathered the church together, previous to this affair, Acts xiv. 27.; that is, there was a company of persons professing the faith, and walking together in the love of the gospel, with proper officers set over them in the Lord, for all the purposes of doctrine and worship, discipline and government, appointed by Jesus Christ. But though this church had their own pastors, teachers, and elders; they had, notwithstanding, a close connection with the church at Jerusalem, Acts xi. 19. 22. 23.

2. In the church at Antioch, *so constituted*, there arose a question, about which the prophets and teachers could not agree. Upon *one* side, there were *certain men* who came down from Judea, Acts xv. 1. These were probably office-bearers, who were received into this church as constituent officers, Acts xi. 27. and xiii. 1. and xv. 1.—Upon the *other* side of the question, Paul and Barnabas, who were both office-bearers at Antioch, are mentioned.—*They* had no small dissention and disputation with *the men* who came down from Judea. Acts xv. 2.

3. The office-bearers at Antioch, as distinguished from the brethren, in that church, had a right to have given judgment in the important cause; as appears from a celebrated precedent of the same court, which our historian hath happily preserved. It is recorded, Acts xiii. 2. 3. ‘While they, *says he*, ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.’ Where it is observable, that the order was not given to the *disciples*, but to the *office-bearers* at Antioch.—And that we might labour under no uncertainty as to the proper constituent members of that presbytery, the *federunt* is marked, and their names are recorded:—namely, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul, Acts xiii. 1.—Accordingly Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen, without the assistance of one private church-member, carried that order into execution;—*they* prayed over Barnabas and Saul, laid *their* hands on them, and by a decree of court, *they*, at once, loosed their present connection with that particular church, and sent them away to move,

move, for a season, in a more public,—a more extensive, and more useful sphere.—According to this precedent, it is evident, that these presbyters at Antioch might, by virtue of their office, have proceeded to a sentence, in the cause now before them,—in as far, at least, as it respected their own flocks, without the interposition of any superior authority whatever.

4. Though the presbyters were a court of Christ properly constituted,—they seem to have considered their decisions, especially if controverted, as all subject to a *court of review*; and, for that reason, unanimously agreed to refer the whole cause, as it stood, to the venerable synod of Judea. This judicious and healing measure is narrated by the historian in the following manner.—They,—*i. e.* the *men* which came down from Judea, on the *one* hand, and *Paul* and *Barnabas*, with their *adherents* on the *other*, determined, that *Paul* and *Barnabas*, to represent one side of the question, and certain others of them,—*i. e.* the presbyters at Antioch, to represent the other, should go up to Jerusalem, in the quality of commissioners, unto the apostles and elders, as constituting a court to which they stood in subordination, about this question,—*i. e.* to have a judgment concerning it, from which there might lie no appeal.—In this sentence, there was an unanimous reference of the cause made by the rulers of the church at Antioch, as *an inferior to a superior court of judicature*. That the referees constituted a court, to which the presbytery of Antioch was subordinate, appears from the reference itself, which was made in order to obtain such a decision, as might be effectually binding on all concerned.—Now, if the church of Judea was not a superior court, the church at Antioch brought upon themselves a needless yoke not imposed by Christ:—and the synod of Judea would not have sustained themselves judges in the matter, unless they had been possessed of an authority for that purpose, from their Lord and Master. The cause was referred to the apostles and elders only. Acts xv. 2.

5. After the commissioners from Antioch had reached the metropolis of Judea,—produced their credentials,—and opened up their cause;—the synod of Jerusalem *FIRST* reasoned upon it, and *THEN* came to an unanimous sentence. The cause was referred

ferred to the apostles and elders *only*; but it was not without reason that the commissioners from Antioch opened their cause before the church, *i. e.* the private Christians at Jerusalem, who were deeply interested in the blessed *event* which gave rise to the question in dispute. Accordingly in the promiscuous assembly of the church, apostles and elders, *these* commissioners faithfully discharged the trust reposed in them, by declaring on the *one* hand, all things that God had done with them, in converting the Gentiles through their ministry, as they had done in passing through Phenice and Samaria, *vers.* 3, 4.—And, on the *other* hand, representing, that some alledged it was needful to circumcise the Gentile converts, and to command them to keep the law of Moses, *vers.* 5. The success of the gospel was told for the edification and comfort of *all the church*; and the question in debate was clearly stated for the information of the apostles and elders. The *church*, or *brethren*, at Jerusalem, had a peculiar interest in the *history* of the gospel, both as to its spread and success; and therefore we read, that the commissioners from Antioch declared in the hearing of the church, as well as of the apostles and elders, all things that God had done with them, *vers.* 4. ‘And all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring,—*N. B.* what miracles and ‘wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them,’ *vers.* 12. And as the *disciples* acted according to their proper province with respect to the *history*; so the *apostles* and *elders*, acted likewise according to theirs, with respect to the *reference* from Antioch: for, having heard the question, as represented, the *apostles* and *elders*, alone, came together, to consider of this matter, *vers.* 6.—there was much disputing among *them*, *vers.* 7.—and, at last, *they* brought the cause to an issue, which is called, ‘the decrees that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were ‘at Jerusalem,’ *Acts* xvi. 4. Whether the brethren were present, during the debate, or not, is not material; but they neither claimed nor obtained the power of judging in it.

6. Two of the commissioners from Antioch, joined by two from Judea, were immediately dispatched with letters to the Gentile-converts, containing an account of the synodical judgment.

The cause was referred from Antioch, *only* to the apostles and

elders in Judea, verſ. 2. *Only* the apoſtles and elders came together to conſider of the matter, verſ. 6.—and the decrees concerning it were ordained *only* by the apoſtles and elders, Acts xvi. 4. The multitude had no hand in the ſentence pronounced, nor pretended any authority for enforcing obedience to it; but *they* ſeem to have joined with the apoſtles and elders in delegating certain perſons to accompany Paul and Barnabas, to bear their epiſtles to Syria, and to illuſtrate the doctrines contained in them. ‘Then it pleaſed the apoſtles and elders, *with the whole church*, to ſend choſen men, *of their own company*, to Antioch, ‘with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas, ſurnamed Barſabas, ‘and Silas; chief men among the brethren,’ Acts xv. 22.—It muſt be particularly noticed, that this was AFTER the matter had been conſidered, and finally determined. To eſtabliſh a conſiſtency between this part of the hiſtory, and what hath already been ſaid, may not the following hypotheſis be admitted? That the apoſtles and elders, as they had done upon a former occaſion, concerning the election and ordination of deacons, Acts vi. 2, 3.—called the multitude of the diſciples unto them, and ſaid, Brethren, LOOK YE out from among you, *two men* of honeſt report, full of the Holy Ghoſt and wiſdom, whom we may APPOINT to negociate this important buſineſs. Upon this hypotheſis, which is neither unnatural, nor in the leaſt improbable, as Judas and Silas were *of their own company*, and chief men among them; they were *fiſt choſen*, by the ſuffrages of the diſciples; and *afterwards impowered*, by the apoſtles and elders. And, if we may reaſon by analogy, from the precedent in the caſe of the deacons, this hypotheſis, will admit of a *moſt ſerious* apology. And moreover, it was expedient for the ſatisfaction of the Gentile-converts at Antioch, to know the general ſenſe of the Chriſtian church in Judea, upon a debate which was ſo intereſting; and it contributed not a little to the increaſe of their joy, that the conſolation was brought unto them by *chief men* among the BRETHREN, who were choſen by the whole church, and impowered by the ſynod to execute this ſervice*. By this meaſure they were fully

* This is more than a conjecture, as will appear from verſ. 27. ‘We have ſent THEREFORE, Judas and Silas, who ſhall tell you the ſame things by
‘mouth.’

certified, both of the decision of the synod, and of the harmony and edification of the church, on this weighty point. And this was the more necessary, because the dissention at Antioch had been occasioned by certain men who came down from Judea, and taught the brethren at Antioch, and said, 'Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved,' Acts xv. 1. To vindicate the faith of the church of Jerusalem, to restore peace in the church at Antioch, and to promote mutual harmony in the ways of the Lord, and give the highest assurance of their unanimity in the common faith,—the apostles, elders, and brethren, seem to have wrote, *in one conjunct body*, to this effect: 'Forasmuch as we have [all] heard [by commissioners from Syria], that certain [men] which went out from us, have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law [of Moses], to whom *we* [the brethren, by election, or the apostles and elders, by ordination] gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being [for this purpose] assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you, with [your own pastors even] our beloved Barnabas and Paul; men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We [the brethren by nomination and choice, and the apostles and elders, by appointment] have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth,' vers. 23.—27.

But that part of the epistle which follows, vers. 28, 29. 'For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication, from which if you keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.' This part of the epistle, I say, contains only the judgment of the apostles and elders which was approved by the whole church: for it supposeth a power, *on the one hand*, to enact; and an obligation, *on the other*, to obey. And the expression, *it seemed good,—to us,—*

'mouth.' The import of this reason must be gathered from vers. 25. 'It seemed good unto us being assembled WITH ONE ACCORD.' These brethren were sent to notify the consent and approbation of the church,

cannot

cannot have a respect to the *brethren*, otherwise than by an *approbation* of what had been decreed by the apostles and elders: for the reference was not made to *the whole church*; they did not come together to consider this matter; and the decrees were not ordained by *them*. There is not the least mention of the whole church interfering, after they had heard the conversion of the Gentiles,—and all the things which God had done with them, and what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles, declared, *vers.* 3, 4, 12.—until the business was over, and the sentence to be carried into execution, *vers.* 22, 23.

7. Upon receiving and reading this epistle from Jerusalem, the Gentile-converts rejoiced for the consolation, *vers.* 30, 31. It does not appear, that the disciples at Antioch were so much as consulted in the *reference*; but all due respect was paid to them, as parties whose edification was principally concerned in making the decree.—For the brethren's behoof, the reference was made;—through the synod's whole reasoning, the interest of the brethren was kept in view.—In the judgment itself, their edification and comfort were principally consulted.—And to them, precisely in the quality of church-members, the synodical letter was addressed.—Wherefore, all the respect was put upon them, that, in such peculiar circumstances, they had reason to look for.

The consequence of announcing the synodical decision, with the approbation of the whole church, to them, was—that they rejoiced for the consolation:—this is obviously expressive of acceptance, approbation, gratitude, humility, delight, and resolution, on the part of the disciples.

That such deference is the indispensable duty of church-members to their pastors and rulers, will appear, from the various lights in which the scriptures represent it. Christians are bound to consider *them*, not as on a level with themselves, but as *over them* in the Lord, 1 Thess. v. 12. Yea, as it follows in the next verse, to *esteem them very highly in love*, for their work's sake. The word [*ὡς ἡμῶν*] implies a *much superior veneration*. But upon the supposition, that the brethren are joint-rulers with their officers, it is impossible to form a conception of Paul's design, in the peculiar emphasis of that exhortation, to esteem so highly

these who *were over them*, [*πρωταρχαὶ*], in the capacity of a man at the head of his own family, 1 Tim. iii. 4. Besides, *submission*, in the Lord, is due by Christians to those who labour among them in the work of the gospel. For, concerning Timothy and Apollos, Paul said to the Corinthians, *'Submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth,'* 1 Cor. xvi. 16.—The word made use of in that passage [*ὑποτάσσασθε*] naturally implies, an *acquiescing* in their judgment, in those decrees, respecting the church, which they may make; and a *readiness* to fall in with the design of them: for, this same word is used to express the *submission* of subjects to civil magistrates, Rom. xiii. 1.—of wives to their own husbands, Eph. v. 22.—of servants to their masters. Tit. ii. 9.—and of children to their parents, Luke ii. 51.—But this submission must be *only in the Lord*. And therefore, as the orders of magistrates, husbands, masters, and parents, may, *in so far as* they are sinful, be disregarded by subjects, wives, servants, and children;—so *in similar circumstances*, the decrees of church-officers may be treated by church-members with all the contempt which they deserve:—but because ecclesiastical rulers may, sometimes, issue out wrong decrees; it will not thence follow, that Christians are not bound to submit to them, *in such decisions* as are supported by scripture.

This is a short abstract of the nervous reasoning in that admirable sermon. I should have been very sorry to impose on my readers this imperfect abridgement, if I could suppose them *all* to be possessed of the original: and on the supposition that they *are not*, I can scarce make a satisfying apology for *not transcribing the whole* of it.

All the attempts which have been made to evade the force of this reasoning, are demonstrably absurd, and injurious to the text. I shall take notice of some of them: and I do it with the more pleasure, because the very objections contribute to the establishing of our argument.

1. Some are pleased to ascribe this synodical judgment to the apostle *James*; because his sentence was approved by the whole, and contained the burden laid upon the Gentiles, by the apostles and elders, who are supposed to have been his *council*,
himself

himself being bishop in the church of Jerusalem.—It is very true, his judgment, recorded Acts xv. 19, 20. was agreed to by the rest of the apostles and elders, vers. 28, 29. But besides the *absurdity* of confining the apostolic labours to one particular church, and the *contradiction* of exalting one apostle above all his brethren; the thing itself is *false*: for the cause, as already observed, was referred to the apostles and elders, not to James only, and the decree which they made was ordained by them accordingly, Acts xv. 2.—and xvi. 4. And whatever emphasis some may think is in the expression, *my sentence is*, Acts xv. 19. [ἐγὼ κρίνω]; it was not peculiar to James only to speak and act *with authority*, in this synod; for the decrees were [κεκριμένα ὑπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων, &c.] *ordained or sentenced* of the apostles and elders, which were at Jerusalem, Acts xvi. 4. And moreover, suppose James had been bishop of Jerusalem, Antioch was not within his diocese; how could he then judge for that church, or lay burdens on them? The whole is ridiculous.

2. Some insist, that this synod was assembled for *consultation* and *advice* merely, in a case which was too hard for the church of Antioch to judge, without their assistance. But two things may be replied on this head. First,—That the judgment of the apostles and elders is described in such a manner, as will not agree to a simple advice. Let the unprejudiced reader peruse the account of it, in Acts xv. 28. ‘It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden, than these necessary things;’—and then honestly say, whether he finds the language of an *equal only*, administering a friendly advice; or, *rather* of the superior, using the united language of tenderness and authority. Let us suppose, that the verse may be translated, ‘It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, that no burden shall henceforth be laid upon you, but these necessary things;’ and that this *burden* is the same thing with the *yoke*, mentioned vers. 10; yet still our argument retains its full force: for, even according to this translation, It seemed good—[ἐπιτιθεσθαι ὑμῖν τὰ ἰσχυρὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας] to lay upon the brethren some necessary things; though not to lay upon them any burden or yoke of bondage. To the same purpose, the judgment of this synod is

called,—*The decrees ordained* of the apostles and elders. The word [*δὲγματα*] *decrees* is found only in Luke ii. 1.—Acts xvii. 7.—Eph. ii. 15.—and Col. ii. 14—besides this text, Acts xvi. 4. And in all these places it signifies, not *an advice*, but an *authoritative and binding law*. Such were the decrees ordained, judged, and decided, of the apostles and elders, which were at Jerusalem. Secondly, The synodical judgment was not addressed to the church at Antioch, nor to any church whatever; but to *single Christians*, vers. 23. If it had been a mere advice or counsel, the church of Antioch would have been immediately addressed in it, to meet together, and deliberate on the propriety of the opinion delivered at Jerusalem; and to judge for themselves, as a church, whether they would receive, and submit to it, or not. But, in fact, their deliberate consultations in this synod are addressed to, and gladly received by, the brethren, as individuals, without once meeting in the capacity of a church, except to hear the synod's decrees reported, explained, and confirmed. These are gravelling difficulties, which embarrass their scheme, who suppose this synod exercised only a judgment of discretion, in giving a prudent advice; but did not act with authority, as a court of judicature.

3. It is alledged,—That the whole church of Jerusalem judged and determined in the cause, which was referred from Antioch. This assertion has been disproved already; and therefore I shall only add, that if we suppose this to have been the case, it will follow, that the brethren in Jerusalem judged for the brethren in Antioch; and that one church referred a weighty cause to the determination of a sister-church, which accordingly gave a decree which was binding on the church which made the reference, while each of these churches is supposed to possess a full and *exclusive* right of exercising discipline within itself *only*. This consequence is denied by all: and the only way to evade it, is to limit the reference and decision to a *bare advice*,—which has been considered already.

4. There are some who consider this synod as *wholly extraordinary*: and, therefore, no precedent to be copied after in future times. They say,—the members of it were, some of them, extraordinary

traordinary officers, *viz.* the apostles;—the occasion of it was extraordinary, *viz.* establishing a rule of conduct for Gentile converts;—and, the decision itself was extraordinary, as appears from the tenor of it, *It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us.* On all these accounts, they think it is presumption to make it an example.—This objection is rather *specious* than solid: for, (1.) Elders, who were not extraordinary office-bearers, were judges as well as the apostles. (2.) The apostles did not act in their extraordinary character, on this occasion; for there was much *disputing* among them, *vers.* 7. which was not the case, when they spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (3.) This synod did not establish a *new rule* of conduct to the Gentile converts; but only judged for them according to the scope of the oracles of God which had been given to the Jews. (4.) Their decrees might well enough be said, to *seem good to the Holy Ghost*, because they were built upon the foundation of those prophetic writings, which were given by his inspiration. And, (5.) Their decision seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to the apostles and elders: a circumstance which demonstrates, with the strongest evidence and greatest certainty, the character in which this synod acted! No piece of divinely inspired writing, which came immediately from God, is delivered in that form; but in the name of God only.

To conclude the argument: it is plain, that all the *essentials* of this synod were *ordinary*;—and that in after-ages, it is a *proper pattern* for imitation: For,——the occasion of it was a great controversy;—commissioners were sent from particular churches to decide it;—they came together accordingly;—they reasoned much on the cause;—they determined the question in debate;—they laid their determination upon the churches; and,—the churches submitted to their decision, and rejoiced for the consolation,

C H A P. XIV.

The Advantages of exercising Discipline on the Presbyterian Scheme.

IF we suppose the scriptural authenticity of the Presbyterian form of church-government, it must be received on the authority of its *divine right*:—and, if this is still doubtful, the many solid

solid advantages which clearly attend this system, so firmly demonstrate its utility, as to throw much additional weight into the proof of its divine original. They recommend it as *worthy* of God, and *fit* for men. Glorious things are spoken of the church, which is the city of God.—She is like a city compactly built together.—Her institutions are wise, prudent, and powerful: they are suitable to her dignity, and promote her edification. There is no occasion for any stretch of laboured description, or eloquent flourish of vain words, to paint the superior usefulness of the Presbyterian order of discipline. It is inconsistent with lordly power; secures the liberty of the people; brings offenders to condign censure; prevents, or purges out, the leaven of error; and makes effectual provision against schism.

I beg leave to illustrate these things, in as few words as I am able.

1. That Presbyterian order is inconsistent with lordly power, is undeniable. The parity of officers in exercising authority is essential to their scheme. None who loveth to have the pre-eminence can, on this plan, expect to find his way to flattering honours, and gratifications of ambition. Accordingly it is known, that the more considerate, whenever they intend to pursue such aims, seek out new connections. All the advantages attending congregational parity, for deposing lordly dominion, are as clearly on the side of Presbytery; nay, more so, as every one vested with office-rule is kept on a foot with his brethren in so many relations, as a co-presbyter in session, presbytery, synod, &c. What appears assuming in an equal is intolerable, and in so many subordinate connections, is not so likely to be endured, as where the relation is single, and where no subordination takes place.

2. That Presbyterian order secures the liberty of the people, is as plain, as that it checks the rising pride of their guides. Democracy has, in all ages, been found an insufficient means of liberty. Its effects have rather shown the form, than the true nature of liberty; though in many instances, we cannot even say it has done so much at that. Anarchy and wild disorder have commonly marked popular governments: where we see things

things run in another channel, under such a model of government, we are constrained to seek, and even if we cannot find, we *must suppose* some other cause. Presbytery, in her lowest form, secures justice to all concerned, being exercised by persons, who are chosen to the office of rule, under a conviction of their being in some good measure qualified with prudence, judgment, and conduct: they live on the spot, and have access to know the cause: they are not parties, and therefore not so much in hazard of being biased and partial: they have no end to serve, but what is honourable and useful. But if they pervert justice, and fail to do what is right, there lies an appeal from their bar to a superior, where they are heard as parties, and liable to censure for misconduct as delinquents, by judges who are still more disinterested in the affair. Can Prelacy plead equal advantages, for removing offences and errors? Nay, can Independency itself put in an equal claim for the peoples privileges? I am bold to say, it cannot. A cause is to be heard: the church collective is the judge; *few* are qualified with capacity enough to understand it, if in any degree nice and difficult, and *the many* decide by their suffrages. What evident hazard is truth in by this procedure? And what adds greatly to the evil, on their principles there is no redress. If the innocent fall, he must lie where he fell.

3. Presbyterian order brings offenders to censure adequate to their crimes; and, I may add, brings every criminal to his own bar. Offences *must* be in the church, and the offenders *must* be censured. The old leaven must be purged out. The rule to direct our procedure is written out, Matth. xviii. 15.—20. And does any plan so much favour and assist in walking by that rule as the Presbyterian, where we have *conjoined* all the united advantages which the Episcopal and Independent orders possess only *in part*? We have all that is competent to congregational discipline for reaching this end, and over and above, have all the benefit which Episcopacy can pretend to derive from her subordination.

4. Presbyterian order prevents, or purges out error, more effectually than any other system. Errors in the church are what infection is in a flock; in the highest degree pernicious,

They

They eat as doth a canker. Suitable remedies must be seasonably, prudently, and vigourously applied. On this head Presbytery may show her face without a blush, as candidate for the prize, whoever be her competitors. Her compass being more extensive, and her process more deliberate, her decision is likely to carry at once more evidence and more weight, than a decision upon any other scheme.

5. Presbyterian order is better calculated to prevent schism than any other. This more extensively teaches the members to have the same care one of another, in congregational and classical connections. This exhibits a visible evidence of the unity, and promotes the most useful communion of the church, not upon the foot of worldly power, derived from, and supported by, the rulers of this world, as in the case of Prelacy, which, as it is generally exercised, lives, moves, and has its very being in that element. This, on the contrary, claims a foundation and support in the scriptures only. Under the wing of civil protection it finds comfort; but, this withdrawn, its foundation is not enfeebled; and, in many instances, it has been convincingly vigorous, in its cementing influence, (even in the opinion of those who could not be reckoned its friends), when it was not only denied the countenance, but pressed under the weighty resentments of civil power.

Well, it may be said, let this be supposed, that a theory of Presbyterian order may be conceived and delineated, which will carry a shew of greater beauty and usefulness than any other scheme of church-polity: but what then? can it be said, that it has more than an ideal excellency, to found its claim to a preference? Compare facts, and then say, is it indeed true, that Presbyterian churches do check pride, preserve liberty, censure offenders, purge errors, or prevent schisms, more effectually, and with greater vigour, than their neighbours? Or is this so peculiar to them, that they do it always, or generally better than others? Now here, I confess, I very much wish I could make a better apology for Presbyterians than I am able. I wish I could more unanswerably appeal to facts and numbers on this question. But when I have admitted this charge, I must take leave to add, that

that Presbyterians, however they practise, are taught to observe all things that Christ hath commanded: and if they do not, it is no fault of their system.*

But there are many defects attending the Episcopal and Independent discipline, which give occasion to several disorders and inconveniences, which that discipline cannot remedy. I shall mention an instance or two in each of these forms. And,

1. In regard to Episcopacy; there are obvious inconveniences, in exercising discipline upon this scheme. It destroys much good, and creates much mischief to the church. It animates pride and ambition, while it does not provide effectually against the ignorance of teachers, and still less against the vices of the people. The diocesan performs much of his work by deputies; and even in that part of it which he cannot do by a substitute, he employs their assistance as much as is consistent with the canons to which he is subject. He sees with the eyes, and hears with the ears of others. He is liable to be deceived, because he must, in the greater part of cases, take his information, as he gets it. In a word, his office is of such a nature, that it is *constitutionally* ineffectual to promote good designs, in suppressing error and vice, maintaining Christian liberty and promoting evangelical purity in the churches.

2. Independency too is *constitutionally* defective. It sets aside proper government, which always includes *rulers* and *ruled*, and

* That the present great decline of many of the Presbyterian churches in purity of doctrine and regularity of government is not owing to any fault in the Presbyterian system will appear if you trace it to its true origin. When the English Presbyterians admitted those errors, for which too many of them are now distinguished, they renounced the Presbyterian order, though they continued to retain the name. The law of patronage is evidently the door by which error has crept into the church of Scotland. In short, we shall find, almost universally, that wherever Presbyterian churches have fallen from that purity of faith which was once so much their ornament, that a breach has first been made upon the Presbyterian order itself. This, therefore, proves an argument in favour of Presbyterian government, rather than against it, for it shews, that till once this government be infringed, error and tyranny can there have no footing. Those who at present are most zealous for the Presbyterian form of government, are generally most zealous for the pure doctrines of the gospel.

substitutes a popular *equality* of ruling power :—it leaves no relief for a brother who may be injured by the judgment of the greater part of the church :—it leaves no room for using discipline, in order to reclaim the larger part of a congregation, if they fall into error :—it cannot provide for uniformity in church-administrations, among sister-churches : with several other defects of the same nature.

Our brethren of the Independent persuasion seem to be sensible enough of some disadvantages which attend their system ; and, therefore, they form themselves into divisions or classes, which they call *boards* :—in these boards they hear and decide references from the churches connected with them. They say indeed, that they do not exercise any act of *jurisdiction* : it may be so ; but they actually judge and determine about the particular churches in their connection, so far as to *allow* or *refuse* them to be *sister-churches* : and the consequences of their *refusing them* are known to be sometimes very *serious*.

C H A P. XV.

The Qualifications, Call, and Office-duties of Deacons.

THE earth is the Lord's, with the fulness thereof ; and the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam according to his sovereign pleasure, without giving any account of his ways. He is not accountable, and he cannot be controuled. ' He doth according to his pleasure in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.' The rich and the poor have, in all places and periods of the world, met together, and the Lord has been the maker of them both :—not only their common Creator ; but the common Disposer of their respective lots. A beautiful variety of *kinds* and *degrees* shines through all nature, and gives inexpressible pleasure to the astonished eye. The diversified scene is no less wonderful and comely in the affairs of men, than in every thing else. History of times past, and daily observation, confirm our belief of an over-ruling providence in this wise and necessary distribution of human conditions. Since mankind was formed into societies, the poor have never ceased
out

out of any land. Under the New-Testament dispensation, our blessed Lord says, his church shall always have the *poor* with them: and he who has *manifested* to be the Messiah promised unto the fathers, by preaching the gospel to the *poor*, Matth. xi. 3. 5. 6. would not leave *them* comfortless. He has provided an help meet for their necessities, by an express appointment, which is moral, and therefore lasting. He obliges his people to have the same care one for another, in respect of things *temporal*, as well as *spiritual*: and, in order to obtain this end still more effectually, has made it a peculiar law of his kingdom,—that on the first day of the week, every one should lay by him for *their supply*, according as God hath prospered him;—and that proper persons attend on the service of collecting what is laid up.

In the apostolic church, this office fell immediately upon the apostles, and, it would seem, was performed by them for a time, until the increase of the poor, and the enlarged labours of these extraordinary messengers, rendered it necessary to appoint *others* to take care of this business; who, from their *ministering* to the necessities of the church, are called DEACONS. The history of the institution of this office is recorded at large, Acts vi. 1.—6. ‘And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.’ In these verses we have the qualifications, call, and office-duties of deacons.

S E C T. I.

The first thing to be noticed is the qualifications of the men, who were to be *chosen* and *ordained* to be deacons in the Christian church.—They must be men of honest report,—full of the Holy Ghost,—and wisdom, *verf.* 3. I shall briefly open the meaning of these dignifying characters, and, as I go along, demonstrate the propriety of each of them.

1. Deacons should be men of honest report,—who have an established reputation for integrity, both within the church, and without it, [*μαρτυρημένοι*] men well attested, who have good evidences of their holy conversation: particularly, they must have proper *recommendations*, on the following heads;—that they are *grave*, staid, and solid in their speech and behaviour; not light, frothy, and mean, which is below the man, and unworthy of the Christian:—that they are *not double-tongued*,—not given to dissimulation, speaking one thing, and meaning another, or carrying two faces, and talking at one time, contrary to what they say at another, as may best serve a turn:—that they are *not given to much wine*,—do not indulge themselves in drinking too freely of any strong liquors, which would not only be a reproach upon their character, but render them very unfit for the duties of their office, and expose them to many temptations:—that they are *not greedy of filthy lucre*,—not of a covetous temper, which would slacken their hands to the poor, and be a temptation to act the part of unfaithful stewards, in privately appropriating some of the church's stock to their own use:—that they *hold the mystery of faith in a good conscience*,—be sound in the faith, stedfastly adhering to, and persevering in, the pure unmixed doctrines of the gospel, with all the sincerity of a heart purified by faith, and purged from an evil conscience by the blood of Christ:—and, that they *be found blameless* upon a fair trial. See 1 Tim. iii. 8. 9. 10.

2. Deacons should be men of God, and *full of the Holy Ghost*. He is the author of all spiritual gifts and graces for the edification of the body of Christ. An abundant supply of the Spirit of Jesus, is both useful and necessary, to the right management of this weighty trust. Humility, condescension, impartiality,

impartiality, zeal, meekness, kindness, and fidelity, are the lovely fruits of the Spirit, which should greatly abound in all the administrations of the Christian deacon. He is called to an office which requires a vigorous and persevering exertion of these excellent tempers, and therefore should be filled with the spirit of love, power, and a sound mind.

3. Deacons should *be full of wisdom*;—men of approved prudence and discretion, that to whom may be trusted the tempers, circumstances, and conditions, both of the church, and of the poor, that the ends of their office may be effectually obtained. Discretion should preserve them, and understanding should keep them. They should, in all their services of love, blend frugality and cheerfulness, with a single view to general usefulness. Where their behaviour in the church, and even in their families, does not promise such a conduct, they are utterly disqualified to act in that character.

S E C T. II.

The call of the deacons, like that of elders, consists in two things, Election and Ordination. These constituted the call of the first seven deacons, Acts vi. 3. 5. 6.

1. They were *elected* by the disciples. The twelve apostles called the whole multitude of the church together, and laid before them the necessity of making provision for the wants of the poor, by proper persons to take care of that business.—The motion was agreeable to the whole multitude:—whereupon the apostles pointed out the number, described the character, and explained the office of the deacons, and recommended to them to *look out* the persons among themselves. Accordingly the whole multitude, with mature and deliberate consideration, made choice of seven men, whom they presented unto the apostles. “It is not likely, (as Henry has observed), that they all cast their eye upon the same men;—but the major vote fell upon the persons here named; and the rest, both of the candidates and electors, acquiesced, and made no disturbance, as the members of societies, in such cases, ought to do.” God has the hearts of all men in his hand, and therefore the best evidence we can have, that *any man* is appointed by him, to a particular post of honour and service in his church, is to find him *qualified* and *chosen* to it.

3. The

2. The return of the election being made, the apostles *ordained* the deacons, whom the whole multitude had chosen and set before them. They performed this service, by *praying* with them, and for them, and by laying their hands upon them, *verf. 6.* The service was the same here as in the ordination of ministers, which has been explained already in the 10th chap. sect. 2.

S E C T. III.

The office-duties of the deacon are summed up in *the serving of tables*, Acts vi. 2. This may have a respect to all the *temporal concerns* of the congregation, which do most naturally fall under his immediate care and inspection; such as providing *bread and wine* for the Lord's table, and assisting in the services of the holy communion, by carrying these elements to the communicants;—and providing for the table of them who minister in the congregation, who are entitled to a suitable allowance for their labours:—but I apprehend it has a particular and direct regard to the *tables of the poor*, to whom the deacons are to distribute the church's stock, with all impartiality, simplicity, cheerfulness, and sympathy.

“ That they may make good proof of their ministering service
 “ for the poor saints, they must be careful—to take exact notice
 “ of such as are poor in the congregation, and have not where,
 “ with to maintain themselves:—from time to time to collect
 “ and receive from the several members of the congregation, and
 “ strangers that come among them, what the Lord shall incline
 “ their hearts to give, for a supply of the necessities of the poor ;
 “ and in a seasonable and Christian way, to stir up and exhort
 “ to charity and liberality, that the more may be given :—to de-
 “ liver faithfully what is collected, that it may be put in the
 “ treasury of the congregation :—to make known timeously the
 “ several conditions and necessities of the poor within the con-
 “ gregation to the session; that provision may be appointed ac-
 “ cordingly for each of them, that so the poor may not be put
 “ to begging, to the grief of their spirits, and reproach of the
 “ gospel :—to distribute to the poor, carefully, honestly, and in
 “ simplicity,—without respect of persons, what is appointed for
 “ supply of their necessities ; and if they be orphans, and young
 “ ones,

“ones, or such as have not understanding, or ability, to dispose
 “and order the things that concern food and raiment, to bestow
 “and lay out what is given for their use, so, as the end of al-
 “lowing it may be best answered: and—to prevent every mis-
 “application of the church’s stock, and lay it out with an im-
 “partial, liberal œconomy.” See a small, but useful tract, en-
 titled, *A Treatise of ruling Elders and Deacons*; printed at Edin-
 burgh, by *Mosman*, anno 1699, p. 76. 77. 78.

From the original institution of deacons, recorded Acts vi.—I apprehend three inferences are obvious and natural.

1. That preaching is not a part of the deacon’s office. The reasons which the apostles urged with the multitude for choosing men to serve tables are remarkable to this purpose; a work which had hitherto been managed by themselves, but, upon so large a swell of the number of believers, could not be attended to with the same exactness, as when the number of converts was small. The case at Jerusalem stood thus, either the poor must be neglected, or the apostles must leave the word of God, and serve tables; or else others must be set over that business.—The first was unjust—the second, unreasonable;—and, therefore, the third was agreed to. But this reason would be absurd for setting up this office, if he that served tables had been, at the same time, called to give himself to prayer, and the ministry of the word, which is the duty of a public teacher. “And, as *Guyse* well ob-
 “serves, it is natural to think, that though Stephen and Philip,
 “and perhaps some others of these first deacons, afterwards
 “preached the gospel; yet, that they did this, not by virtue of
 “their deaconship, but of some other commission given to them
 “as evangelists, which they received, not before, but after they
 “had been chosen to that office: for,—it is not likely, that they,
 “who were already evangelists, should be so far diverted from
 “their main superiour work, as to serve tables.” But, as Dr. Owen says, “if a new office be erected under the name of dea-
 “cons, it is in the will of them by whom it is erected, to assign
 “what power unto it they please.” *True Nature of a Gospel-
 church*, p. 190. Moreover, it follows as another inference.

2. That the deacon’s office is of standing use in the Christian church.

church. Every circumstance about their office, proves the continuance of it. They were to take care of the poor, who shall never cease out of the church:—they were appointed, because the public teachers were not *sufficient* to attend to the whole work of praying, preaching, and the ministrations for the poor;—they were ordained in other churches, besides that of Jerusalem, Phil.

i. 1.—Their qualifications, call, and office, are particularly described, 1 Tim. iii. 8, 9, 10, 11. And an encouraging promise is annexed unto the diligent discharge of this office, vers. 13.

‘For they that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.’ Whatever is the sense of that *good degree*, which deacons purchase unto themselves, it is evidently an encouragement unto diligence, zeal, and faithfulness in their office.

3. It is evident from their original institution, and the business which they were set over, that deacons have no authority, from their office, to exercise discipline, or to *rule* over the church. There were no complaints at Jerusalem, of any neglect of discipline under the watchful eye of their elders:—the only complaint was, that the widows were neglected in the daily ministrations, Acts vi. 1.—To remedy this neglect, the apostles proposed that the whole church should look out among them seven men to be *set over* THAT BUSINESS:—the saying pleased the whole multitude, who accordingly chose the men, and presented them to the apostles, and the apostles ordained them. In all this history there is not a word about *ruling*, nor indeed any where else, in the word of God. And the total silence of the scriptures *on that head*, is enough to satisfy us; especially since we have an account of their *office*, and the several *duties* of it, and the *manner* of of managing it, particularly described in the inspired page.

I must say, and cannot help saying it with earnestness and concern,—that it is greatly to the shame and reproach of Presbyterians, who acknowledge the divine institution, importance, and use of this sacred office, to overlook it so much, as *many* of them do. How loudly would they complain of other denominations for a neglect so criminal, and so justly blameable, if they themselves

were

were not first and deepest in the provoking transgression? Instead of attempting to extenuate or vindicate our crime, let us be stirred up to repent, and do our first works; to set up, and maintain this part of the order of the house of God.

C H A P. XVI.

Of scandalous Offences.

THE discipline and order of the gospel-church are planted with a view to offences; either to *prevent*, or *reform* them. Without understanding the nature of *scandal*, it is hardly possible to know the *meaning*, and still more difficult to know the use, of the appointments of Christ for her government and conduct. The *exercise* of *church-authority* is, alas! too frequently demanded, on occasions of this kind. An Heathen remarks, that—*Fratrium quoque gratia rara est*. “The good agreement of brethren “is a rare thing.” A mournful, self-evident truth in *religious* societies, as well as *civil*.—This part of our subject is nice, and ought to be handled with great caution. Extremes are always vicious:—in this case, they are, moreover, dangerous, if not pernicious.

That same author proposes a golden mean betwixt *severity* and *neglect* in discipline, in these words, *Cuncta prius tentanda: sed immedicabile vulnus ense recidendum; ne pars sincera trabatur*. “All “things are first to be tried; but an incurable wound must be “cut off, lest the sound part be infected.” A cautious maxim, which highly deserves to be entered among the first rules of good policy, in the conduct of social life!

The imperfections which attend believers in this present state, together with the mixed character of the members of the visible church, 1 John ii. 19. account, to the meanest capacity, for many irregularities and offences, which arise among brethren, united in the closest bonds of Christian fellowship; and may prevent all surprize at what our Lord has told us, Matth. xviii. 7. ‘It must needs be that offences come.’ A considerable part of the system of social duties, incumbent, by divine authority, on church-members, is planned on the supposition of offences; shewing how they *may be avoided*; and how they *should be removed*. The

imperfections of men's understandings, and the difference of their capacities, joined with that perverseness of temper, and remaining depravity of nature, which cleave to the best, render some degree of offence among Christian brethren unavoidable. And *as* these considerations account for the existence of *sinful* and pernicious scandals and offences; *so* it is easy to vindicate the justice, and demonstrate the wisdom and goodness, of the Lord Jesus, in suffering things to take this course. The great propriety of this part of the divine dispensation shines forth convincingly, in such instances as these.

1. By this means he secures the righteous purposes of his resentment upon hypocrites and unbelievers, as is plain from 2 Theff. i. 6.—9. 'Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us; when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.' Chap. ii. 8.—12. 'And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.'

2. By means of scandalous offences, he diffuses religious benefits, among his people: Phil. i. 12.—14. 'But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me, have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel: so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold

to

‘to speak the word without fear.’ Rom. xi. 20, 21, 22. * Well ;
 ‘because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest
 ‘by faith. Be not high minded, but fear. For if God spared
 ‘not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.
 ‘Behold therefore the goodness, and severity of God : on them
 ‘which fell, severity ; but towards thee, goodness, if thou con-
 ‘tinue in his goodness : otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.’
 1 Cor. xi. 19. ‘For there must be also heresies among you, that
 ‘they which are approved, may be made manifest among you.’

3. He makes them advantageous to the world in general, and
 a special means of spreading the gospel of his grace ; II. viii. 11,
 12. ‘For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and
 ‘instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people,
 ‘saying, say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this
 ‘people shall say, A confederacy ; neither fear ye their fear, nor
 ‘be afraid.’ Rom. xiv. 18, 19. ‘For he that in these things
 ‘serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men.
 ‘Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace,
 ‘and things wherewith one may edify another.*

By consulting Rom. xiv. and other passages of holy writ, and
 attending to facts as they occur to daily observation, we find that
 offences frequently come, not so much through the untenderness
 of the persons, who are supposed to *give*, as from the infirmity of
 these who *take the disgust*. Sometimes a mote in a brother’s eye
 swells prodigiously to our view, while the real cause is some de-
 fect in our own organs of sight, or some undue medium in which
 the object is placed. This is excellently discussed by the very
 ingenious Dr. Watts, in that part of his treatise on Logic, where
 he discourses on *prejudices*. To which I refer the inquisitive
 student, who digs for the *knowledge*, that he may *practise* the
 truth.

However sweet sin is to the depraved taste, there is something
 so shameful and vile in its nature, that offenders, to prevent its
 concomitant reproach, commonly seek a corner, were they may

* I do not enlarge on these particulars. They are insisted on, at great length,
 by the Rev. Mr. Bradbury, in his *Twenty-eight Sermons concerning offences*, &c.
 p. 61.---93.

safely pursue the pleasure, without exposing themselves to the deserved contempt, of their criminal conduct. O stupid insatiation, thus, upon the matter, to deny the omniscience, or defy the vengeance of the God who is above! Sins committed with so much secrecy, that they are totally unknown, or so universally, that they give no offence, and pass among the best of men, if not as matters of duty, at least as things of indifference, as in fact was the construction anciently put on polygamy, are not proper scandals. But where an offence is given, or, which is all one in the present case, and has the very same effects, is supposed to be given, by an irregularity of conversation, which discovers, or is thought to proceed from, a prevailing bad temper, and this is known but to one, or a few, joined in the sacred bonds of Christian brotherhood, an occasion of stumbling is laid in the way of these brethren; who must not hate their offending brother, by going up and down as tale-bearers, to publish his faults, to divulge what was secret, to aggravate his crimes, and make the worst of every thing which is amiss, with a design to blast and ruin his reputation, and to sow discord among neighbours; nor as the manner of some is, must they conceal their displeasure, saying neither good nor bad to the offender, till they have an opportunity of a full revenge. Instead of hating, the offended party is expressly called to rebuke his offending neighbour in any wise, and not to suffer sin upon him, Lev. xix. 16, 17. Friendly reproof is a duty we owe to one another, and it ought to be taken, as well as given, in love, Psal. cxli. 6. Prov. xxvii. 5, 6. To forbear reproofing, *where there is occasion*, is an evidence of the want of Christian love, which covers a multitude of sins from others, but not so much as one from the sinner himself.—By not using faithful reproofs, we suffer sin upon our brother, O unnatural cruelty! And what is more, we are in danger to bear sin for him, as the margin reads it. It is a just thing with God, to interpret *our neglect* to reprove the unfruitful works of darkness, a *notable degree of fellowship* with them, Eph. v. 3. How full and express to the purpose, is that direction of the Lord Jesus Christ, Matth. xviii. 15. ‘If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him

† his

“his fault between him and thee alone!” But it very often falls out, that as bitterness mingles with the reproof, so pride and passion keenly resent it, and between both, every good fruit of it is quite blasted. But let us suppose, which charity and justice oblige us to do, (unless some overt-act give visible proof to the contrary), that the offended party conducts his reproof with a friendly temper: it is evident, that the success is not always equal to reasonable desire and expectation. Satisfaction in a private personal affair, entirely removes the scandal, because it is known, and can be offensive to no more than these who obtain satisfaction. But in case the offender persists in denying, extenuating, or vindicating his offence; compassion and justice loudly call on the offended party to use the means appointed by God, to compass the great ends of his conviction, repentance and reformation, Matth. xviii. 16. “But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” That is, says Dr. Guyse, “if he be obstinate and angry, or will not fall under his fault, then take with you one or two other disinterested prudent Christian brethren of the church, to which both of you may belong, still further to hear, and judge of the case between him and you, and to join in an admonition, as occasion requires, that it may have the greater weight with him, to convince and make him ashamed, as coming from the mouth of two or three witnesses, of the nature of his crime, and of his behaviour under it.” Happy for the church of God, when differences are managed with that friendly and becoming temper! One poor wise man may be of singular use, by his prudence, to restore, stablish, strengthen, and settle order and harmony, where misunderstandings, prejudice, and misconduct had threatened the most fatal consequences. Where this order is observed, and these measures are pursued with singleness of heart, and in humble dependence on the divine blessing to render them effectual, I believe, experience will agree, that they *generally* succeed to answer their end. But daily observation undeniably demonstrates, that this method is not infallibly productive of the desired event, in so much, that the offender

fender is often no more wrought upon by their united attempt, than when the person offended went to him singly. In this case, the wisdom of the church's Head provides, Matth. xviii. 17. That if he shall neglect to hear them, the offence must be de-lated to the church. I take it for granted, for the reasons before assigned that by the *church* is meant the *elders* of the church, exercising the authority of Christ judicially. These form that church, which must hear, judge, and determine in the cause.

CHAP. XVII.

The MANNER of exercising the Discipline and Authority of the Church, in her judicial Proceedings.

THAT *their decisions* may answer the *ends* of exercising their authority, namely, to justify wisdom, to vindicate truth, to convince the guilty, to support the innocent, and to edify all concerned, the following characters must stamp the whole of the church's managements with visible and convincing impressions; *viz.* openness, regularity, moderation, long-suffering, prudence, equity, impartiality, and a tendency to promote edification. Allow me to premise, that though a private offence, brought by orderly gradation before a church-court, is the immediate occasion of our Lord's delivering this Rule, in reference to the exercise of church-authority: the order and manner of proceeding in every affair competent to their judgment, should be uniform, and of a piece.

1. I SAID, in the first place, that the procedures of the church in her authoritative decisions, should be *open*. Truth and honesty, are their own shield, and need no covering of deceit, or darkness, to set them off with advantage. Nothing will so much commend their decisions, as a manifestation of the truth. This carries with it the greatest weight and clearest light to the conscience. It is inconsistent with the design of exercising church-rule, to require *abstruse distinctions*, and the *arts of criticism*, to discover the meaning, or support the equity, of her decrees.

2. Regularity is another characteristic mark, impressed on the commendable managements of the church of God. Our God is

not

not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. Disorder cannot be avoided by any other means than these, that we walk orderly, and by the rule of God's word too. So far as a society gives up with regularity and order, it weakens its own foundations, and defeats its own intentions. As the model of the church is drawn, so the plan of her administrations is faithfully laid out in the word of God. As many as walk according to this rule, peace shall be on them: but if any presume to break through this hedge, a serpent will bite him. The neglect of order will soon introduce anarchy, and the wildest confusion, which are inconsistent with the present welfare, and, in a short time, must put an end to the very being, of society. Regularity of management, supposes a fixed standard of useful conduct, and implies an uniform attention to that standard, in all similar circumstances. The standing rule of exercising church-authority, is to be found in the word of God, either in express positive directions, or couched under such general heads, as refer to the reason of things, and the dictates of common sense, about social fellowship, 1 Cor. xi. 13. 14. The business of the church, is to apply these general and particular rules faithfully and prudently, as occasion requires. This is the more needful, as it is certain, a judicatory cannot say with a safe conscience, and a good grace, *It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us*, but only when they are conscious to themselves, and are able to satisfy the world, that their procedures, in order to a definitive judgment, harmonize with these standing rules. And it is a plain case, that their decisions are essentially defective, when they do not deserve such a superscription. It is not enough that the end be good; the means for compassing that end must also be commendable, and, in their nature and use, suited to answer the purpose.

3. Church-managements should be *moderate and gentle*. It is a general rule of behaviour, which is recorded in Phil. iv. 5. 'Let your moderation be known to all men.' Elders assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, are no where exempted from its obligation. This moderation exhibits a just contrast to that furious, forward, and indiscreet temper, which, by an egregious

gious mistake, has somehow obtained, and almost monopolized, the honourable name of *zeal*: while no more is meant by it, than "a passionate warmth of spirit, firmly attaching a man to the interest and credit of a party, and exciting his indignation against whatever person, party, or system, he supposes to stand in the way of advancing his own connections." This is commonly called zeal, with much the same propriety and truth, as light is put for darkness, and darkness for light. One thing, however, must be observed here, that we ought not to consider this blind zeal as an infallible proof of the badness of those principles themselves in the support and defence of which it is manifested. It is granted, the presumption is very strong on the unfavourable side, but it is not demonstrative: the disciples of our Lord Jesus discovered this temper, in a very surprising light, Luke ix. 51.—56. But it cannot be pretended, that the system of their religious principles was really bad: though to be sure, which is unexceptionably the case with all bigots, their zeal was not according to sound, experimental knowledge of the nature, contents, and genius, of the principles of the oracles of God. However, to detect and expose all counterfeits of genuine Christian zeal, let it be laid down as a fixed and unalterable maxim; "That the first and principal province of Christian zeal is in relation to ourselves; and to other people only in the second place, as we have only a secondary concern in them." *Evans on Zeal*. "Bigots, on the contrary, consider zeal, as if it chiefly related to the conduct of other people, rather than their own." A practical truth worthy of much attention, and, being realized in Christian practice, would be followed with a plentiful harvest of the best blessings to the church of Christ. The moderation which should visibly characterize the decrees ordained by the thrones of the house of Christ, is sweetly consistent with that fervour of mind to support the cause of truth, and the interests of holiness, which the Spirit of God every where enjoins. This moderation is displayed in several things;—in weighing in an even balance, all the aggravations and alleviations attending a cause;—in forming an estimate of circumstances and facts, in a just proportion to their value and importance;—in being
ready

ready to admit a favourable construction, on any doubtful circumstance in the case of a particular delinquent;—in making necessary allowances, for human infirmities; where there is no convincing proof of wicked intentions;—in avoiding all wrath, bitterness, and rancour, which can never work the righteousness of God;—in placing their confidence, rather in the *evidence* of truth favouring their decisions, than in the *weight of authority* among their hands; and in other things of that kind. I make no doubt some will cry, “Yes, yes! Be moderate, and inherit Gallio’s character, and Laodicea’s curse: but God commands “us to do with our might, what our hand findeth to do.” He does so, and when I have put the rather too warm objectors in mind, that he also requires us to do it with our prudence, Matth. x. 16. and with all the circumstances mentioned, Col. iii. 12. 13. 14. I presume they will not venture to say, the meaning of that text Eccl. ix. 10. is misrepresented.

4. Long-suffering is the next characteristic, I shall mention, of the judicial procedures of the church. This stands opposed to all rashness, forwardness, and headlong, indeliberate precipitancy, in their measures: an extreme which men, blind to the consequences of things, soon rush into, but from which it is not so easy to emerge. Two things strongly plead for this manner of proceeding.—It is a likely means of gaining an important end, in reference to the parties concerned in the sentence to be given; this allows them time for consideration; prevents surprise; and either brings them to a good temper, or leaves them under a bad one, without excuse.—Secondly, To proceed slowly, is of advantage to the court, as it enables them to know the cause fully, and to weigh every circumstance maturely, and so, with a good conscience, to bring out an edifying sentence. These poor self-sufficient mortals, who imagine themselves qualified to judge in any cause, as soon as they hear it mentioned, are near of kin to the man described, Prov. xviii. 13. and deserve to inherit his reward.—It is so well known, and so universally granted, that the wisest men and ablest judges, are most cautious, well knowing the power and danger of prejudice; that it cannot be interpreted less than an affront to the reason and common sense of man-

kind, to do otherwise. The long-suffering of God is much celebrated and extolled in his word, and is proposed as a pattern of our imitation. I am far from thinking, that error or iniquity should be tolerated with any shew of approbation: all I plead for is, that great eagerness to extirpate these abominations, should never induce us to take unhallowed measures, by breaking through that and the like express appointments, and statute-laws of the Most High, Eph. iv. 2. None can pretend, that the long-suffering of God implies any thing like an indulgence to do evil: nor can any approbation of what is amiss, in an offending brother, be justly inferred from the exercise of that long-suffering, which is the fruit of the blessed Spirit.

5. The affairs which come before a court of Christ, should be conducted with prudence. In general, this consists in discerning, and employing the most proper means of obtaining those ends which we propose. It is an important branch of prudence, to avoid faults with all possible care. One false step sometimes ruins, or, however, greatly embarrasses a good design. Prudent conduct depends more on great caution and circumspection, than on great abilities. Prudence likewise supposes, the maintaining of innocence and integrity. We may not neglect duty to avoid danger: but we are called to exercise prudence, in doing it in the way which will least expose us to inconveniencies, and that is most likely to secure the object we have in our eye. We are never, out of a pretence of discretion, to desert the cause of truth; but we are to maintain it in the way which is least offensive to others, and least dangerous to ourselves. On no pretence, are we allowed to use unlawful means to obtain a good end. The end being supposed to be good, the means must be so too. Christian prudence should direct every measure of church-discipline, according to that general rule, Eph. v. 15. 'See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.' Prudence directs, in this case, to several steps, that are of very great consequence to the peace, order, and comfort of society: such as,—First, To endeavour to know well our own tempers, outward circumstances, and relations to others: this is necessary and useful, to prevent self-conceit, on the one hand, and mean-
ness

ness of spirit and conduct on the other.—Secondly, To endeavour to know other men, their circumstances, talents, and disposition.—Thirdly, To watch and embrace all opportunities, Eccl. iii. 1.—11. Prov. x. 5.—Fourthly, To advise with those who are able, from deep knowledge of human nature, to give good counsel, Prov. xv. 22. and xx. 18. and xii. 15. And prudence directs to chuse a counsellor remarkable for his sincerity, as much as for his capacity.—Fifthly, To restrain and govern unsocial affections, as anger, eagerness, an hasty spirit, and the like. O to see the elders who rule the flock of God, wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

6. Equity is a character which must stamp every judgment of the church, Prov. xvii. 15. ‘He that justifieth the wicked, and ‘he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination ‘to the Lord.’ The elders of the church have no right, on any pretence, to judge in civil causes, and to decide about civil interest and honour: but there are certain rights and privileges of a spiritual nature, which belong to Christians, as joined in holy communion with one another. The governments which Christ hath set in his church, are constituted the guardians of these rights, by the will and testament of the Lord Jesus, Matth. xxviii. 20. compared with Rev. ii. 2. and iii. 3. To do justly, is prescribed to all who bear rule on earth. It was eminently the character of the lawgiver in Sion. ‘That he that ruleth over men must be ‘just, ruling in the fear of God,’ 2 Sam. xxiii. 3. And his disciples, according to the eminence of their several characters, must be still learning of him. The throne of iniquity can have no fellowship with this righteous Ruler. It is a confessed case, that a steward must be faithful; he receives his instructions, and is accountable for his trust. And can a Protestant pretend, that any thing *more* than a *ministerial trust* is lodged with mortals? When we hear the votaries for Rome asserting, “That it may “be affirmed, in a good sense, that Christ has given Peter power “to make that to be sin, which is no sin; and that which is no “sin, to be sin;” *Bellarminus de excusatione Barclaii, cap. xxxi.*: it shocks our reason, but confirms our faith in the holy scriptures, where we read, ‘That Antichrist opposeth, and exalteth
Q² ‘himself

'himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped,'
 2 Theff. ii. 4. The parable of the unjust steward is much to our purpose, Luke xvi. 1.—12.

7. All things in the church of God must be done, according to his commandment, without partiality. Riches, honours, and employments, lay no foundation for a preference, in admission to religious privileges, or deciding religious disputes. Here, as in the grave, the rich and the poor meet together upon equal terms. There are few things can be imputed to a judge of a more odious nature, and more out of character, than to charge him with partiality. A gift must not blind his eyes, and neither friendship nor connections must bias his judgment. And surely it is beneath a worthy man, to plead any privilege, to defend himself against a legal pursuer. That judge, who treats even a faulty person with injustice or hardship, makes himself enemies, and the criminal friends, pitiers at least. And that person is guilty of false heroism, who, in doing more than in justice is due to one person, does less than is due to another. The Spirit of God has set up a very solemn and express caveat against every thing of this kind, James ii. 1.—14. and 1 Tim. v. 21. &c.

8. Last of all, every measure relative to the order and discipline of the house of God, should be calculated for the edification of the body of Christ. This is a general rule, taken from one main end of instituting an order of government in her, which is much insisted on by the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. xiv. 26. and 2 Cor. x. 8. In order to reach this end, several things are necessary: the following may serve as a specimen. First, Whatever would mar edification, must, if possible, be prevented, by prudent and persevering attention to every duty incumbent in social life, and particularly among Christian brethren. It is incomparably better to prevent, than to remove, a fatal disorder. Secondly, Whatever has taken place to mar edification, must be speedily and prudently cured, otherwise it will eat like a gangrene. A disorder seemingly small in its beginning, will, in a short time, like the running stream, gather strength by its progress, and may perhaps become incurable. Thirdly, Whatever measures tend to employ all the church, in the duties of their several places and relations, do on that account edify most.

These rules are of such moment, and deserve so great a weight to be laid upon them, that to neglect or disregard them, must, in time, be fatal to the *being*, as they will, at the present, effectually subvert the *comfort and purity*, of the society where they should be applied. I cannot look on them in any other light, than as *essential conditions* of exercising church authority, with any prospect of real usefulness. The nearer that any church approaches in conformity to them, the more success they may reasonably expect from them: and the more they overlook them, the less reason they have to think that God will prosper their managements. They are not seeking him after the due order, and have some cause to fear, that the Lord will, one way or other, make a breach among them.

But where discipline is exercised in that manner, there is ground to believe, that the presence, blessing, and countenance of Jesus Christ, shall attend his own institutions, and accompany their decisions, Matth. xviii. 18. 19. 20.

C H A P. XVIII.

The doctrinal Part of Excommunication:—where its Nature, Grounds, Effects, Ends, and Warrants,—are explained.

THE case of the offender being, in the order before mentioned, laid before the *representatives* of the faithful, who are vested with ruling powers; it is their business to deal honestly with his conscience; to impress on his mind a persuasion of the holiness, justice, and omniscience of God; to open the nature and aggravations of the offence, which it is alledged he hath given; and to urge the obligation he is under, by the divine law, to glorify God, and satisfy his brethren, by an ingenuous confession of the truth. If he hearken to their authority, own his sin, profess his sorrow, and promise reformation, the end is so far gained. It only remains, that the church consider, in what manner the offence is to be removed:—whether the nature and circumstances of the case, render it most edifying to make it public, that others may be satisfied with their brother, and may fear to offend in that manner; or to keep it private, without spreading what is, perhaps, but little known: and whether a solemn

solemn admonition, or a sharp rebuke, are most adequate to the crime. Having settled these points, they must *act* accordingly.

But the greatest difficulty is still a-coming. What if the delated offender will not hear the church? What if he shall continue obstinate, under all the means used for his conviction and humiliation? The facts are proved, but no crime is confessed; or, perhaps, he shews all visible evidences of disregard to the church's authority: what must be done in this case? The answer to these inquiries you will find in Matth. xviii. 17. 'If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an Heathen man and a publican.'

That we may better understand the meaning of this, it is proper to attempt an explication of these particulars: *viz.* The nature, grounds, effects, ends, and warrants, of the exclusion which Christ prescribes in a case so circumstanced.

S E C T. I.

First of all, it is necessary that we understand *the nature* of this exclusion. This is commonly known by the name of *excommunication*, or casting out of communion and fellowship with the church. Secular interests have metamorphosed this ordinance of Christ into an hideous monster, and rendered it an engine of priestly tyranny, and of worldly influence, over the consciences, lives, and property of men. And it is amazing to see what profound respect is paid to this idol, which is indebted to carnal policy for its very existence and power. But that we may rescue this institution from all corruption and disguise, the following things may be observed.

(1.) That it is an ordinance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its success depends on the blessing of Him only, who is the author of the institution: therefore it is to be gone about in his name, and with his power, 1 Cor. v. 4.

(2.) That the way of proceeding in it, is so particularly described in the word of God, that any remarkable corruption will admit of no honest apology.

(3.) That the whole authority, power, and efficacy of it, are *merely spiritual*, and do not, directly or indirectly, extend to damage in life, liberty, or civil property. The government of the church can reach the conscience only.

(4.) That it is of two kinds, called by Presbyterians *the lesser* and *the greater* excommunication. The *lesser* excommunication, is a judicial suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's supper for a season. The nature and effect of this censure is declared, in 2 Thess. iii. 6. 14. 15. 'We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed: yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.' Here is a man with whom no company is to be kept, and from whom we are to withdraw, who is, nevertheless, to be still considered *as a brother*: because the exclusion is not absolute and total, as in some other cases, when the person is to be looked on *as an Heathen*. The *greater* excommunication, is the casting out of an impenitent and notorious sinner, from all special communion, and participation in church-order, worship, and privileges, and delivering him to Satan, the god of this world, in distinction from Christ the head of the church. Such a one is to be considered by the church as an Heathen man and a publican, who may attend on ordinances of general communion, as preaching, praying, and praising; but is totally expelled from fellowship in ordinances which belong, in their nature, use, and design, to believers only, 1 Cor. v. 13. Tit. iii. 10.

S E C T. II.

Let us, in the second place, examine *the grounds* and causes of this total exclusion from church-communion. For greater distinctness, I shall lay down my mind in these particulars.

(1.) Those things which offend against human authority only, and the laws of men, in matters of religion, cannot, in the nature of things, be a ground of excluding from, because they are not the condition of admitting to, church-communion. It is the liberty of Christians, to have one Father and one Lord. It is their sin and folly, to endeavour to serve two masters: the thing is impossible. Not *men*, but CHRIST, is the church's master and lawgiver, whom she should hear in all things.

(2.) Matters

(2.) Matters of doubtful disputation are no sufficient ground. The reason is self-evident, Rom. xiv. 1. 'Him that is weak in the faith receive you, but not to doubtful disputations.' This imports evidently, that these doubtful disputations are not the conditions of joining in, and therefore cannot be the grounds of excluding from, church-fellowship.

(3.) Matters of indifferency can, with no grace, be once mentioned, as grounds of this excommunication. Are they indifferent, then why should they be peremptorily imposed? What entitles men to bind that on their brethren as necessary, which the word of God has left them at liberty to do or forbear? God is greater than men.

(4.) Offences which are founded in, and arise from, human infirmity, are not sufficient grounds for this censure. Sometimes the scandal is owing to a weakness of understanding, whereby the person apprehends divine truths in a false light, or wrong connection, and is (what we may call) *bonestly* mistaken. Sometimes it must be ascribed to a weakness of conduct, whereby a person, through fear or shame, dissembles on some occasion, what he allows. An instance of the first, you find in the Jewish converts, Rom. xiv. ; and an instance of the last, in Peter, Gal. ii. 11. 12. Now, to make these infirmities, which in the general course of a Christian profession, are fully consistent with integrity, the ground of this censure, is most absurd ; and, if pursued, would totally ruin all society. How much is the plan of church-fellowship to be valued on this, as well as other accounts, that it provides in this case an effectual cure, which is quite of a different nature? Rom. xv. 1. 2. Gal. vi. 1. 2. Therefore I conclude,

(5.) That the only thing which will justify the church, in looking on any member *as a Heathen*, must be *unrelenting presumption*. By presumption I mean, a conduct which is not reconcilable with a man's knowledge and convictions ; but opposite to both. And this presumptuous conduct must be persevered in without relenting, or it cannot reasonably be the foundation of the excommunication of which we speak. The unrelenting presumption of church-members becomes offensive, and the ground of a
just

just process, in order to exclusion, in two cases, which claim our notice.

First, When errors, subversive of the gospel, and of our hope towards God, are advanced and maintained, Tit. iii. 10, 11. 'A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject: knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, [αὐτοκαταργητός], being condemned of himself.' See Dr. Guyse's paraphrase and note on the place.

Secondly, When persons persevere in the practice of any scandalous sin, after private and public admonitions. Several things are requisite to constitute obstinacy in sin: as, (1.) That the thing blamed be owned to be a sin by *all*, without doubting, dispute, or hesitation. I cannot help transcribing a few lines from the celebrated Dr. Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel-church*, pages 211, 212. "It must," says he, "be some sin that is judged and condemned in the light of nature, or in the express testimony of scripture; yea, such as the Holy Ghost witnesseth, that *continued in without repentance*, it is inconsistent with salvation. If the thing itself, to be animadverted on, be dubious or disputable, whether it be a sin or no, especially such a sin, either from the nature of the fact, or the qualifications of the person offending, or from other circumstances, so as that the guilty person is not *self-condemned*, nor are others fully satisfied in their minds about the nature of it, there is no room for excommunication in such cases. And if it be once allowed to be applied towards *any sins*, but such as are evident to be so in the light of nature, and express testimony of scripture, not only will the administration of it be made difficult, a matter of *dispute*, unfit for the determination of the church; but it will leave it unto the wills of men to prostitute unto litigious brawls, quarrels, and differences, wherein interest and partiality may take place; which is to profane this divine institution. But confine it, as it ought to be, unto such sins as are condemned in the light of nature, or by express testimony of scripture, as inconsistent with salvation by Jesus Christ, if persisted in, and all things that belong unto the administration of it will be plain and easy." To offer any excuse for transcribing

R

ing

ing so much pertinent and good sense, would be unpardonable and ridiculous. (2.) In order to convict a person of obstinacy in sin, it is also necessary that the facts charged, be either owned or clearly proved. And, (3.) That a proper time be allowed to him to consider seriously his conduct, and the nature and design of this awful ordinance. And if, after all, he neglect to hear the church, the rule is express, 1 Cor. v. 13. 'Put away from 'among yourselves that wicked person.' The amount of all is this, That unrelenting presumption, and obstinacy, in maintaining errors, subversive of the faith once delivered to the saints, or in committing sins, condemned by the light of nature, or express testimonies of revelation, are the *only grounds* of declaring judiciously, that any member of the church is to be considered *as an Heathen*, and of delivering him, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, unto Satan the god of this world.

S E C T. III.

The *effects* of this judicial exclusion from church-communion, fall under our consideration in the next place. The account which Christ has given of these is recorded Matth. xviii. 18. 'Verily, 'I say unto you, Whatsoever ye (the church) shall bind on 'earth, shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever ye shall loose 'on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.' There are two material points to be noticed here, previous to what is immediately to my purpose. (1.) That this *power of binding and loosing* belongeth to church-officers only. And, (2.) That this power is not only doctrinal, but *authoritative* and *juridical*. The laborious Mr. George Gillespie has prevented my trouble, in setting the evidence of these assertions in a clear light. (See *Aaron's Rod blossoming*, pages 409.—423.) What I am now to attempt is, to open the meaning of this binding, and to shew how far it extends. Under the limitations just now mentioned, I heartily adopt that sense of the whole verse which is given in *Guyse's paraphrase* : his words are these, "I assuredly tell you, that whatsoever ye, in this way of proceeding, according to my will, shall bind upon the offender on earth, by a due censure for his obstinacy and sin, shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever, in this way, ye shall unbind, or loose, upon his re-
"pentance,

“penitance, by taking off the censure, and restoring him, shall be
 “loosed in heaven: all that ye do in a right manner, according
 “to the rule of my word, shall be ratified above, and God will
 “set his seal to it at the day of judgment.” A serious, solemn,
 awful, and alarming truth! With what caution should this cen-
 sure be inflicted! with what reverence should it be witnessed!
 and with what holy awe should it be considered by the persons
 who have fallen under it! To proceed in it rashly and presump-
 tuously, how audacious! To be hardened under it, when justly
 deserved, how shockingly profane! It were better for these that
 use it to serve a turn, that a mill-stone were hanged about their
 necks, and they cast into the sea: and it were better for them
 who despise this ordinance of Christ duly administered, that they
 had never been born.

SECTION IV.

I come, in the fourth place, to take notice of the *ends* of this
 awful institution. These are enumerated in the *Westminster Con-
 fession*, chap. xxx. and the third paragraph, in these words,
 “Church-censures are necessary for the reclaiming and gaining
 “of offending brethren; for the deterring of others from the like
 “offences: for the purging out of that leaven which might in-
 “fect the whole lump; for vindicating the honour of Christ,
 “and the holy profession of the gospel; and for preventing the
 “wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they
 “should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof, to be pro-
 “faned by notorious and obstinate offenders.” They may be
 reduced to these three heads.

(1.) This ordinance of excommunication is intended to be
 useful to the *offenders*; and that in several respects; for example,
 to make them thoroughly sensible of their crime; to make them
 ashamed; to make them afraid; to bring them to repentance;
 and consequently, that they may be eternally saved. Jude 23.
 2 Theff. iii. 14. 1 Tim. i. 20. 1 Cor. v. 5.

(2.) It is useful in respect of *others*; to prevent their being
 partakers in the sins of these presumptuous offenders; and to
 deter them from committing the like, 1 Tim. v. 20. ‘Them
 ‘that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.’ 2 Cor.

vii. 12. 'Wherefore though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you.' That is according to Dr. Guyse, as if the apostle had said, "For though I wrote to you with some smartness, particularly about the incestuous person, it was not from any pique or prejudice against him, who had dealt so injuriously in defiling his father's wife, nor from any pleasure that I had in the thoughts of his being chastised for it; nor was it from any partiality, through favour or affection, toward the father himself, who had been so ill used by him; no, nor was it *barely* to reclaim the one, and, as far as in me lay, to do justice to the other, though this is what I had much at heart; but it principally proceeded from the sincere concern which I had for you, as in the sight and presence of the heart-searching God, and from an earnest desire of discovering it in the most effectual manner to you, that ye might be preserved from the infection, and the blast, which such a person's continuing among you might have brought upon you; and that the glory of Christ, and the honour and purity of the whole church, might not suffer, through their neglect of doing the duty, which in that case was incumbent upon them."

(3.) It is necessary to vindicate and maintain the *credit of religion*; by purging out the old leaven. Without this, the church and the world must become all one, and the church would no longer be a society chosen out of the world.—This is essential to the keeping up of its purity and holiness, 2 Cor. vi. 14.—18. Thus, it appears, that the welfare of the offender, and of the society, and of religion, call for this severity.

SECT V.

The scriptural *warrants* for this solemn ordinance, likewise claim our notice. As the whole form of the gospel-church is laid out in the Bible, either in general or particular rules, we must find there also, the warrant authorising this piece of her conduct. In general, I might observe, that all lawful societies, constituted by voluntary confederation, according to peculiar laws and rules, unto certain duties and ends, have a right, which the

the light of nature discovers, to receive into their society, those who are willing and meet; and to expel those who wilfully deviate from these rules. This is the very life and form of every community of men in the world; without it they can neither unite nor subsist. We have already seen, that union in a church-state is constituted by voluntary mutual agreement; that their privileges and duties in that connection do not belong to them, either as men, or as members of a civil empire, but *merely* as Christians; and that they have authoritative power, to answer all the purposes of government and discipline, conferred on them by their glorious Head, whereby they are authorized to receive members, and exercise authoritative rule among them. This renders it, at least, highly probable, that they have power to exclude from their fellowship for proper causes: and the scripture puts it beyond all doubt. For,

(1.) He hath given to them the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to remit or retain, in earth and in heaven, the sins of their members, that the church may be holy, unblameable, and without offence in the world, Matth. xvi. 19. No man in his senses can imagine, that this end can be obtained, merely in a doctrinal way; discipline must also be used, or else the declared intention of this stewardship will be effectually marred.

(2.) The institution of this censure is expressly contained in Matth. xviii. 15.—20. where we have an account of a scandal; of the order of laying it before the church; of her determination; and of a consequent obstinacy, followed by a total exclusion.

(3.) In agreeableness to this, we have the example of the church at Corinth, 1 Cor. v. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7. where we may run and read the following things: the cause of excommunication, a scandalous sin unrepented of; the warrant for it, which is the institution of Christ; the manner of it, by an act of authority; the effect of it, a total separation from the special privileges of the church; and the end of it, to purge and vindicate the church, and to bring the offender to repentance and salvation.

C H A P. XIX.

The practical Part of Excommunication :—Where the MANNER of administering it ;—the CARRIAGE of Church-members towards one who is excommunicated ;—and the MANNER and CONDITIONS of receiving him in again,—are opened.

HAVING thus far dispatched the subject, under our consideration, by attempting to explain and vindicate the scriptural view of the nature, causes, effects, ends and warrant of exclusion from all fellowship with the Christian church in her ordinances of special communion ; it remains that I discuss two or three practical points, which have been but very superficially, if at all, noticed, in our progress. (1.) The manner of administering it. (2.) The carriage of church-members towards the person who is excluded. And, (3.) To show in what manner, and upon what terms, he may be loosed from that dreadful sentence. These particulars, besides what has already been advanced, will exhaust what seems to be most material on the head of excommunication.

S E C T. I.

We begin with the manner of administering this ordinance of excommunication. I do not mean so much to describe the *characters* of the church's procedure, as the very *proceedings* and inward temper themselves, which are according to the mind of Christ. Let us suppose, that every regular step has been taken to ripen the process, but still the offence, through unrelenting obstinacy and presumption in the offender, is not at all removed ; the church must then, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ with prayer and humiliation under a due sense of the future judgment of Jesus Christ, deliver him unto Satan.

(1.) Prayer is one step which must by no means be neglected. Any solemn ordinance of the gospel is profaned, when the authority of Christ is not owned, nor divine assistance solicited, by prayer. Here, in particular, prayer is to be used, that the church may be directed ; that her decisions may be ratified with divine approbation ; and that the end may be effectually obtained, for the humiliation, repentance, and salvation of the offender.

(2.) Humiliation and mourning is an exercise, which should
always

always accompany the administration of this ordinance, 1 Cor. v. 2. The apostle blames that church, because they had not mourned, that he who had done that wicked deed, (mentioned in the preceding verse), might be taken away from among them. And in 2 Cor. xii. 21. the exercise of discipline against offenders is called, *A bewailing them that have sinned*. This is a most reasonable service.

(3.) The whole should be proceeded in with a due sense of the future general judgment. The church is acting for Christ, in this business, and her conduct exhibits a faint representation of the awful procedures of that solemn day, when God will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, and will eternally cut off all hypocrites, and impenitent sinners. And wo to them who dare pronounce this sentence, without a well-grounded persuasion, that it is the sentence of Christ himself, which will then have his approbation.

The inward temper which should prevail in the minds of those who put away any of their members, while they are engaged in that work, may be gathered from what has been already said. Particularly, it should be managed with meekness, compassion, and the various tempers described, 2 Cor. vii. 11. 'Behold, this self-same thing,' &c.

S E C T. II.

The second point to be considered, is the *carriage* of church-members towards one who has been justly excluded from their communion. The rule on this head is laid down, 1 Cor. v. 11. 'With such an one, no not to eat;' and Matth. xviii. 17. 'Let him be unto thee as an Heathen man and a publican.' The meaning of the first is happily expressed by Dr. Guyse, in these words: "Ye ought to be shy and reserved in your ordinary behaviour toward such an one, and not so much as unnecessarily, and out of choice, sit down with familiarity at common meals, much less at the Lord's table, with him; that, while he ob-serves your distant carriage towards him, he may see how infamous he has rendered himself, and may be ashamed of his evil ways." The sense of the last text he opens in these words: "Withdraw your religious communion, and unnecessary con-
" versation

"versation from him, so as to have no more to do with him, than if he were an Heathen, or one of the most abandoned of men." To set the matter in a clear light, I beg leave to make the following remarks.

(1.) All ordinary conversation with them about *secular* things should be avoided, as much as possible. Necessary converse, founded on previous connections, does not fall under this rule.

(2.) Excommunication cannot warrant a *suspension* of any duty antecedently binding, by a natural or moral relation; as that of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of magistrates and subjects, of masters and servants. The reason is plain; the ordinance is of a spiritual nature, and therefore belongs to the church, *as such*, and cannot affect such relations, and relative duties, as are merely civil. The case here is an exact parallel to that in 1 Cor. vii. 12, 13. 'If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away; and the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.'

(3.) The church ought to continue to deal, as they have opportunity, with the excommunicated offender, by admonition, reproof, and every means suited to reach conviction to his conscience. This is clear from the dictates of humanity, and is expressly enjoined in the word of God, Jude 23. 'Others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire,' &c.

SECT. III.

I shall conclude this subject, by shewing, in a few words, in what manner, and upon what terms, the excluded offender may be loosed from this awful censure, and restored to church-communion. We have the sure word of prophecy to guide our views and measures in this affair, 2 Cor. ii. 6, 7, 8. Where it is plain, that the offender must see his sin, loath and abhor himself, and be deeply abased in his own eyes, and afflicted for it, and must turn from it before he is restored. Without some evidence of this, he cannot be considered in any light, more favourable for him, than at the time of his exclusion. He must consent to a solemn public rebuke for his public offence, 1 Tim.

v. 20. All resentments for his past misconduct must be veiled with friendly affection; and upon his profession of repentance, the church should behave in such a manner towards him, as may carry the plainest conviction, that their dealings with him, from first to last, have not proceeded from any hatred to his person, but only to his enormous crime, and from a sincere concern for his spiritual benefit. They should, in the spirit of meekness, receive him again into their holy communion, as one whom they have reason to think Christ hath received, and to deal with him as a restored brother. An easy credulity, in believing well of a person, without sufficient evidence, is one extreme; and to be inexorably severe and suspicious, without just cause, is another. The safe medium, is to rest on such *credible evidences*, as would satisfy an enquiring mind not biassed with interest, honour, or affection: such a person is always most impartial, and, of course, the most upright judge of what is either excellent and real, or the opposite of both. I know there is one objection urged against the Presbyterian order, in exercising this part of discipline by the elders only, that the apostle says, the censure inflicted on the incestuous person, was inflicted of *many*, that is, say some, of the whole church, the community of the faithful. As the whole stress, of this objection rests on the word, [*πλειονες*], translated *many*, I would observe, that this word is not only used to signify a *multitude*, as in many texts; but to denote *excellency*, *dignity*, and *eminence*, Luke xi. 31, 32. Heb. xi. 4. In the former texts, our translators have rendered it *greater*, and in the last, *more excellent*. And when the reasons formerly advanced, to prove that the exercise of discipline is competent only to the elders of the church, are thrown into the scale, I am satisfied, these senses of the word are to be preferred in this text, which hold out the order of the churches in a light that is worthy of Christ, and consistent with itself. Suppose then, we render it, 'The punishment that was inflicted of the *chiefest*,' with those eminent critics, Heinſius and Piscator, on the place; or the punishment which was inflicted of the *greater* and *more excellent* persons, namely, in respect of office. In either case, the version ascribes to the persons who inflicted the censure no higher

S

powers,

powers, than are included in the words elsewhere used to express the office, powers, and honours wherewith elders are clothed, such as [*Ἐπισκοποῦντες, ποιοῦσθαι, ἡγούμενοι*], and others. This would effectually provide against the extremes gone into by the Prelatic system, on the one hand, which confines the power of excommunication to one bishop, and by the Independent system on the other, which extends this power to the whole body of the faithful; and completely harmonizes the scripture-account of the discipline of the house of God. And if the word [*πλείονες*], being comparative, is supposed to denote number, it may signify, that the judgment of the church is decisive by *plurality* of voices, even though there be not unanimity. Though this is evidently not the sense of the place.

I have designedly omitted that famous question;—Whether the delivering to Satan, 1 Cor. v. 5. refers to an extraordinary miraculous act, by which the person was delivered up to the power of the devil, to inflict diseases and torments upon his body? I heartily adopt the opinion of Dr. Owen on the gospel-church, pages 202.—206. and Dr. Guyse's note on the place referred to, whose arguments for the negative, carry the strongest conviction to my mind.

I may add, it was not through oversight, that I have taken no direct notice of their opinion, who strenuously insist, that excommunication from church-fellowship, is the province of the civil magistrate. But the reason is plainly this, That the account of the nature, constitution, order, privileges, and duties of the gospel-church, laid down in the word of God, condemns and abhors such a conceit; whoever cleaves to the one, must give up with the other. The cause is largely debated by Mr. G. Gillespie, in his book entitled, *Aaron's Rod blossoming*. A book which is well worth the attention of the curious and inquisitive on this argument.

C H A P. XX.

The doctrinal Part of Schism :—Where the Parts, Union, and Fellowship, of the Gospel-church, are considered.

WERE I to open the discourse on schism, with bitter invectives against it, as an ugly monster, and against all who practise it, or aid, comfort, abet, assist, and maintain others in practising it, I would only tread in the beaten road of almost all writers on the subject, who are commonly eloquent and warm on this topic. But the covering is too thin, and the varnish rather too mean, to conceal the design of these declamations, from the view of impartial readers of ordinary discernment, who cannot well miss to see, that they are intended, either to render some party odious; or to remove violent, and sometimes well-grounded suspicions of this guilt, truly imputed to the party, in whose behalf the writer stands forth an apologist to the public: as they say, the greatest villain will raise his voice highest in the general cry, *Catch thief*. The Papist charges this crime on the Protestant; and one Protestant charges it on another. And in short, the hideous outcries, raised about it, have been made an engine and pretence for exercising the greatest cruelties, oppressions, and murders, which have troubled the Christian world.

To discover truth is a pleasant entertainment to an ingenuous mind, which has no self-interest at stake, except what is consistent with maintaining a conscience void of offence towards God and man: but to find out what is truth, and the mind of Christ, in a practical case of so great concern to general edification, as *schism*, which is the point under present consideration, is on all hands confessed to be—must afford the highest satisfaction.

The meaning of the word will assist us a good deal in forming a true judgment about the nature of the thing. Lexicographers agree, that [*σχίσμα*] properly signifies a rent, a rift, or separation of the parts in a solid body; the word denotes, “A severing and parting of these things which were united and closely joined together.” Or, in other words, “It is a parting, either voluntarily, or by constraint, of the pieces which did cleave together, and constituted one whole.” See the very learned and accurate critics, Leigh and Stockius on the word. The frequent

use of this word, and the root from which it comes, is a clear proof of the truth of this account of it. It is used to signify, the rent of a garment, Luke v. 36.; the rending asunder of the vail of the temple, Matth. xxvii. 51.; the rending of the rocks, *ibid.*; and the breaking of the net which was full of fishes, John xxi. 11. By an easy unforced metaphor, this term is applied to the mind, and signifies both *division* and *dissention*, whereby the hearts of men are split into opposite factions and interests.

That we may apprehend this point in a just light, it is necessary to review, with all possible attention, these three heads, (1.) The parts; (2.) The union and fellowship; and, (3.) The rent, of the gospel-church.

S E C T. I.

I shall, in the first place, consider the PARTS of the gospel-church. Until we know these, we cannot understand to any purpose their union or separation. This is only another name for her *members*, of whom the apostle says, 1 Cor. xii. 'As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. The body is not one member, but many. Now there are many members, yet but one body. Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular,' vers. 12. 14. 20. 27. Although I readily grant, that metaphysical distinctions and terms of art in divinity, have, in many instances, ministered to unprofitable and vain speculation, rather than godly edifying; yet I cannot persuade myself, that it is proper to lay aside these terms and distinctions which necessity introduced, and immemorial use has rendered familiar, even in divinity. Errors, and misapprehensions of others, oblige us to express our notions in a cautious manner, to form a proper contrast to what we suppose is erroneous in their sentiments; and sometimes the advantage of expressing a whole sentence, and all that belongs to some particular idea, by one word which is stamped with currency, and a determined peculiarity of meaning, strongly plead for the use of a term which is not of doubtful signification. In this light I apprehend we may adopt the usual distinctions which writers make of the church, as she is *invisible*, Eph. i. 22. 23. or *visible*, Matth.

xiii. 47. The visible church, again, is either *catholic* or *particular*, 1 Cor. i. 2. where we find them *both* mentioned and distinguished. The use I would make of these distinctions, may be opened in the following particulars.

(1.) The members of the *invisible church* are true believers only, who have put on the new man, &c.

(2.) The members of the *catholic visible church*, are all those throughout the whole world, who call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, together with their children, 1 Cor. i. 2. and 1 Cor. vii. 14.

(3.) The members of a *particular visible church*, are all these who agree in a professed belief of, and subjection to one system of the faith and order of the gospel, under the direction of them who exercise rule in the connections to which they belong. For the reasons already given, I cannot admit, that particular churches are precisely the same thing as particular congregations, which assemble in one place for joining in the fellowship, and exercising all the offices of church-members among themselves, totally independent on any other connection. The scripture-account of the churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, and others before noticed, seems to carry a most convincing evidence on the contrary side. It is high time,

S E C T. II.

In the second place, To examine the union and fellowship of the members of the gospel-church. The whole of our apprehensions about schism will be either true or false, as we conceive this union and fellowship in a true or false light. The following remarks may be suggested on this head.

(1.) The invisible church is joined together by spiritual and invisible bands of union. Their union is, in the first place, with the Lord Jesus Christ, unto whom they are joined, so as to be in him, to be one with him, to be one spirit, one body, one building, one vine, one new man, &c. This union of believers with Christ by one spirit, is of the utmost importance to be well stated and opened: but all my labour is superseded on the head, by the very judicious account of it, in *Marshall's Treatise on Sanctification*, under the 3d direction; *Hervéy's Theron and Aspasio*, letter

letter 12th; and *Boston's fourfold State of Man*, state 3d, head 2d. Being joined to the blessed Head, believers become brethren and fellow-members of Christ, and have the same care one of another, as members of the same body, 1 Cor. xii. 25. 26. 27. and 1 John iii. 14.

(2.) The union of the catholic visible church consists, in their owning the same Head; professing the same faith, for substance; and walking, in the general course of their conversation, by the same rule, Eph. iv. 3.—6. This union may consist with many differences in opinion and conduct; but cannot be reconciled to a professed and declared *dislike* of any article of faith, or rule of obedience, which *they believe* to be contained in the word of God, nor of what *they own* to be the *image of God*, in Christians of other denominations. These who proceed that length, declare themselves to be enemies to God, by their wicked works, and have given up with all claim to the Christian character. Such a spirit does not consist with common honesty, and is quite the reverse of true Christianity. The bonds of this union are, a declared belief of divine truth, a declared love to the divine law, a declared concern for the common salvation, and a declared esteem of, and affection to the children of God, who bear his image, and aim at conformity to his will, 1 Cor. i. 2. Luke ix. 49. 50.

(3.) The union of the members of a particular visible church, is described, with the utmost simplicity, in Acts ii. 42. ‘They continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.’ While they walk in the fear of the Lord, cleaving to one system of truth, worship, and order, they are comforted and edified in the love of the truth, and of one another, as fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the promise of God in Christ, by the gospel, Eph. iii. 6. The union of a particular visible church, is far from being a *human thing*; it is enjoined and modelled by God, and derives all its numerous train of enriching benefits from his blessing upon it. It belongs to Zion’s King, to appoint the terms, and draw out the whole plan, of her union and fellowship. Under the Old Testament, God ordained all the loops and
taches,

taches, which coupled the curtains together, to make one tabernacle; and in like manner, under the New, Christ hath ordained the bands, which couple the members of a particular church together, to make one church, as well as the bands of union in the catholic church, whether visible or invisible. It is for this reason, we cannot allow, that IT STANDS, (1.) In human rites and observations about religion, which can only trace their original as high, as the pleasure of the church, or the authority of the magistrate: Nor, (2.) In one visible head, whether pope, patriarch, or bishop, or council: Nor, (3.) In the civil laws of princes: Nor, (4.) In assembling together in one place, for worshipping God. The union of believers in the church of Jerusalem was a perfect contrast to all these, Acts iv. 32. ‘The multitude of them that believed, were of one heart, and of one soul:’ they were so united in faith and love, that how various soever their natural tempers were, and how much soever they had been strangers to one another, and of different sects and parties before, they were *now* as entirely harmonious, and heartily affectionate to their fellow-Christians, as if they had all been animated with one soul. A joint profession of, and attachment to, the faith and order of the gospel, in respect of doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, in one connection, is that which constitutes the union; and the improvement of these, is the fellowship of a particular church. In the last place,

S E C T. III.

I shall endeavour, by the assistance of those principles, to state and explain the true nature of schism, as it refers to the church of the living God. It has been already observed, that schism is properly “a parting of those things which are closely united and “joined together.” As this term is applied to the church, it must denote a splitting of her members, which are joined in the sacred bonds of her communion, as [σύνσωμοι καὶ συμμέτοχοι], Eph. iii. 6. which emphatic words are rendered by some of the most eminent critics, *concorpores*, & *una participes*, concorporated, and co-partners or co-partakers of the promise. I shall take the liberty to observe on this head,

- (1.) That there can be no rent and schism in the mystical body

body of Christ, as such. The members of this church cannot be parted from their interest in the love of God, Rom. viii. 38. 39.; in the life of Christ, John xiv. 19.; in the grace, and indwelling presence and operations of the Holy Ghost, John xiv. 16. Eph. i. 13. 14.; in the new covenant, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. If. liv. 10.; and in one another, as brethren in the same family, heirs of the same inheritance, and begotten with the same word of truth, which continually abides in their hearts, 1 John iii. 9. 1 Pet. i. 23. As they are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus: as they are begotten to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead: as they are made partakers of a divine nature, and constituted *one new man*, in Christ:—they are, and shall for ever continue to be, *one in the Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ*, John xvii. 20.—23. and, *in the Holy Ghost*, 1 John ii. 27.

(2.) As schism has respect to the visible church *only*; so in a particular manner, it denotes such a rent as takes place among the members of one part of the visible church, which have been joined together, in professing the same system, and exercising rule and discipline in the same connection. And it is very evident, from the scriptural use of the word, that schism does not mean a separation *from* the church; but uncharitable and disorderly dissensions and divisions in it. The saints at Corinth were but *one* church, and yet, in three several instances, and, on as many accounts, they are cautioned against, or charged with, this crime, 1 Cor. i. 10.—and xi. 18.—and xii. 25. To attend to these passages in their scope and connection, is the best way to obtain the certain, undeceiving knowledge of our subject. I begin with 1 Cor. i. 10. ‘I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same things, and that there be no divisions among you [*μη ἢ ἐν ὑμῖν σχίσματα*]; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.’ The apostle had just affirmed in the verse before, that they were called [*εἰς κοινωνίαν*] unto the fellowship of the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord; to partake of external privileges, as well as to have an holy communion with Christ.

Imme-

Immediately on the back of this, he exhorts them to cultivate, with ardent zeal, this fellowship with the Son of God, and with one another : he manages this part of his work, by exhibiting in a striking lively contrast, their sin and their duty : and these are contrary the one to the other. Their duty is summed up in three heads :—To be perfectly joined together in the same mind ; and—in the same judgment ; and—to speak the same things. The word [*καταρτιζον*] very happily rendered, to ‘join perfectly,’ throws abundance of light on the verse. It signifies, to fit any thing for a particular station, use, and design ; to fix it accordingly in its destined place ; and to join it in close connection as a part of the whole, or a means to the end. When we unite all these together, I apprehend, we conceive the true meaning of the Holy Ghost. This regular, intimate, and perfect conjunction, of these Corinthian believers, must refer, (1.) to their mind and sentiments, in every important and momentous truth : (2.) to their judgment and designs : and, (3.) to their language, which must be ordered and directed by the oracles of God. Whatsoever is not conducted in the church by this rule, has no title to be esteemed a part of the fellowship of the saints. Every departure from this excellent standard, is a schism in the body, so far as it goes : this is more than barely hinted, in the contrast between speaking the same things, and being perfectly joined, &c. on the one hand ; and there being divisions or schisms among them, on the other. But the meaning of the expression is still further cleared up, in the following verses, where the apostle tells them, that there were contentions among them, [*εἰδές*], warm strifes, and uncharitable dissensions, whereby they were disunited in mind and judgment ; and instead of speaking the same things, were divided in their language, and used a dialect which leaves no room to doubt, whether there was a rent in their sentiments and designs. Every one said, ‘I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ.’ The truth is, at that time, envying, and strife, and divisions, [*διχοστασίαι*] prevailed so much, that Christian social graces were almost altogether neglected, 1 Cor. iii. 3. 4. 5. And where the form of them was retained, the designs were so evidently selfish,

T

and

and interested, that it could not excuse them from the just charge of schisms or divisions among them. Let us go on to examine,

1 Cor. xi. 18. 'When ye come together in the church, I hear 'that there be divisions among you,' [*ἀλλὰ σχίσματα ἐν ὑμῖν ὑπαρχειν*]. The case which the apostle is handling, is the celebration of the Lord's supper. It seems, there were some great mismanagements among them, which reflected deeply on their honour, and very much marred their edification. The disorder in their religious meetings was so great and so pernicious, that instead of glorifying Christ, and edifying one another, they dishonoured his worthy name, hurt their own souls, and offended their brethren: in a word, they came together, not for the better, but for the worse. They came together into the same place, and celebrated the same ordinances, and yet there were schisms among them. From all which it is manifest, that schism is something else than separation from a church, and properly characterises such differences, as are managed under the influence of corrupt tempers, which are inconsistent with her edification and comfort. When the avowed sentiments, affections, and conversation of the members of a church are not of a piece, and differences in judgment are mutually called in question, resented, and exposed; can we forbear to say of that church, that she is schismatical? Has she any satisfying evidence of being perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment, and speaking the truth in love? Nay, is not the supposed case, a perfect contrast, and therefore real schism? This was precisely the case at Corinth. The last text which claims our notice, to enable us to judge in what sense the Holy Ghost makes use of the word schism, is in,

1 Cor. xii. 25. 'That there should be no schism in the body; 'but that the members should have the same care one for another.' The apostle begins this chapter, with some account of the spiritual gifts, which seem to have abounded to an uncommon degree, in that church. He allows that they were divers and many; but observes, that they were all wrought by one spirit, and were all given to profit the church, in the great wisdom of her blessed Head. Instead of being puffed up with pride therefore, every member

member ought to look on himself as a part of the body, and to consider how he may improve his peculiar gift with humility, for general usefulness. He enlarges on a very happy comparison, at great length, between the human body, and the mystical body of Christ: the amount of his reasoning and illustration is collected in these words, 'God hath tempered the body together, that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular,' verſ. 24.—27. The human body is tempered together, by the hand of God: the connection is ſo cloſe, that though each member preſerves its proper place, all is mingled and loſt in one whole body. Every part is comely and uſeful in its place; it depends on, and renders eſſential and important ſervices to, the body. Hence they have the ſame care one of another, and mutually feel in each others pains and pleaſures. The ſufferings and ſorrows, the honours and joys, of the weakeſt and ſtrongeſt, of the more and leſs honourable members, are common to every member, and the whole body; becauſe God hath ſo tempered it together, [*συνεπιπλεον*] hath blended the aims and intereſts, the comforts and miſeries, of the united parts in the whole ſyſtem. Self-conſciouſneſs in every man, affords an unanſwerable demonſtration, that this is really the caſe. And the apoſtle obſerves, that it is preciſely ſo with the church: her 'members being many, are one body in Chriſt, and every one members one of another,' Rom. xiii. 5. But if the eye ſhould ſay to the hand, I have no need of you; there would be a ſchiſm in the natural body. If again, any member ſhould ſay, Becauſe I am not placed in another ſtation, and fitted to another office, I am not a part of, and owe no ſervice to, the body; this would be the diſſonance, and want of care for, and reſpect to, fellow-members, which the apoſtle calls ſchiſm in the body. An evil which is exactly the reverſe of that care one for another, which includes all the offices due from the members to one another. In like manner, ſhould the members of the church ſo far forget their place, and neglect

their duty, as to have no proper care for one another's welfare, and not to perform conscientiously and cheerfully the duties of their place and station ; but instead of this, judge their brethren, and set them at nought : (Dr. Guyse, on Rom. xiv. 10.) in such a case, how is the unity of the Spirit preserved in the bond of peace ? According to the apostle's reasoning, there is a real schism in the body ; that is, an alienation of affection, a breach, disharmony, and disrespect to fellow members : from all which, it comes to pass, that they have not a like solicitous concern, and natural care of the mutual welfare of one another, which their fellow-membership in one body obliges them to maintain.

On the whole, I cannot express my mind on this subject better, than in the words of Mr. Tong, (*Life of Mr. Henry*, page (mibi) 282, 293) where he is giving an account of a discourse concerning the nature of schism, published by the said Mr. Henry, and sums up the scope of the piece in the following terms. " In it he" (Mr. Henry) " enquires what that sin is, that the word of God calls schism, and from all the places in scripture where that word is found, he makes it to appear, that it signifies, *N. B. uncharitableness and alienation of affection among Christians* ; and judges, there may be schism, where there is no separate communion ; and there may be a separate communion, where there is no schism."

C H A P. XXI.

The Practical Part of Schism :—where its Circumstances, Causes, Prevention, and Cure,—are represented.

THERE are three things relative to schism, which more immediately belong to practice, which must be particularly attended to, before this subject is dismissed : and I humbly conceive, they will exhaust whatever is of any considerable importance on the point, besides what has been already noticed. Let us then examine, (1.) The circumstances, (2.) The causes, and (3.) The prevention, and cure of schisms.

S-E C T. I.

1. Let us enquire into the circumstances of schism ; or, when it may be said, there are *divisions* in a church. I hope it will appear to be a very modest and reasonable assertion, that nothing ought

ought to be esteemed schism, but that which is called by that name, or hath the entire nature of what is so called in scripture: and every thing ought to be accounted schism, which has either the name or the nature of schism, attributed to it in the word of God. The reason of this assertion is obvious; schism is a disorder in that society, which owes its very being, and all its order, to divine revelation. Now the following circumstances must concur to form a schism, according to this rule of judging about it; which may be all gathered from the texts just now explained.

(1.) That the person or persons, who cause it, belong to, and be members of some particular church of Christ, which hath the prophets and apostles for its foundation, Jesus Christ being the chief corner-stone.

(2.) That the point in difference, refers either in a nearer or more distant way to the worship of God: if it concerns civil matters only, it cannot be called a schism; and if it respect doctrines, it must go by another name than that of schism, which has a respect only to what is *practical* in religion.

(3.) The ground of it must concern the edification and comfort of the church, in her social duties and relations.

(4.) Yet not sufficient, in the opinion of the church-members concerned, to dissolve their social connections; where it goes so far as that, it merits another name than schism. But to constitute a schism,

(5.) The difference must be managed with eagerness, and unsocial tempers, which are, so far as they prevail, destructive of every good fruit of religious society. A catalogue of these bad and schismatical tempers, is made out in 2 Cor. xii. 20. 'Debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults.' Indeed this seems to be that which constitutes the very nature of schism, under all the foregoing conditions. If any of these conditions do not agree, I cannot see reason to call misunderstandings among Christians, a schism: but where they unite, whether the point of difference among the professed body of Christ be more or less important, I dare not call the whole by a softer name than it deserves; "there are schisms among them."

S E C T. II.

The causes of schisms in the church are various. In general indeed, the root of this bitterness is laid open in James iv. 1. 'Whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not of your lusts, that war in your members?' These lusts are numerous and manifest. The following catalogue is a specimen:—

(1.) Pride is a horrible schismatic. The proud man has so high an opinion of himself, that it is impossible that he can have the same care of, and respect to fellow-members. By stretching beyond his line, and swelling himself above his size, he breaks in upon the unity, harmony, and order of the body.

(2.) Self-love is another great schismatic. This induces a man to wish and attempt to unite all things to himself, instead of uniting himself to, and cultivating useful fellowship with, the church.

(3.) Jealousy is another spring of schism among the followers of the Lamb; when they suspect secret designs to be practised by their brethren, or that their eminence of character will eclipse their own: it is extremely difficult, to avoid schisms, which grow on this root as naturally as grapes on the vine.

(4.) Hatred and dislike are a plentiful source of this abomination. This is inconsistent with that love which unites Christians; it sets a man against his brother, and destroys much; I had almost said, all good in society.

(5.) Evil-speaking frequently causes schisms in the church. 'The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue amongst our members; that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature.' Many other causes might be assigned, such as covetousness, lust of dominion over others, and an immoderate thirst after the honours, riches, and pleasures of this world; which all operate to this effect, of rending the mystical body of Christ. I have mentioned only criminal causes of division and schism, without pretending to shew in what cases it may be justified: the reason is, that I do not find hinted under this name, in the word of God, any thing which is commendable, or which can admit of any justification. Schism is always in the oracles of God, taken in a bad sense, ascribed to a reproachful

reproachful cause, and represented as producing bitter effects; and to presume to justify it, would be, with a witness, to speak wickedly for God.

SECT. III.

The third and last particular, proposed for consideration, is, the prevention and cure of this ecclesiastical disorder. The grand and neverfailing recipe is prescribed and attested, by the Physician of Gilead, in these terms, Matth. xvi. 24. 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' See likewise Mark viii. 34. and Luke ix. 23. I cannot pretend to state the nature and import of these duties fully: though a *general* account of them is necessary.

(1.) The first branch of duty recommended and enjoined to the man who would be a follower of Christ, is, to deny himself. Self and Christ are two masters; and no man can serve both. Their wisdom, their will, and their interests, are opposites, and a downright contradiction to each other. He that will cleave to himself, must despise Christ; and he that loveth Christ must deny himself. Whenever, and so far as it pleaseth God, to reveal his Son in any man; straightway, the person conferreth not with flesh and blood. Every thing which denominates a man, *sinful, vain, or carnal*, is the *self* which must be denied; and in denying this *self*, provision is withdrawn from the lusts thereof, before-named, which are the true origin of wars and fightings, and schisms among Christians. The more that self is denied, the more will schism be prevented and suppressed.

(2.) The second thing which Christ here requires of his disciples is, to take up their cross. Even as men, they cannot but find many crosses in the world; but as Christians, they must expect more: for Christ himself hath told them, that in the world they shall have tribulation. The expression "taking up your cross," is plainly allusive to a known custom among the Romans, who obliged these who were to be crucified, to take their cross, or at least part of it, upon their shoulders, and carry it to the place of execution. It is not to my purpose, to enlarge on the occasion of this command, mentioned in the context; only it cannot be refused to be a word fitly spoken. Trials will ever attend

attend the people of God, in cleaving to his way, and these, many a time, from the hand of unkind, or misled brethren : here is the trial and proof of the patience of the saints, to take up the cross of Christ, and to cause no schism in the body on account of those trials.

(3.) The last duty required of the disciples of Christ, is to follow their Lord whithersoever he goes. A duty which is to be first formed, by 'walking, even as he also walked,' 1 John ii. 6. He must be followed as a righteous and sovereign Law-giver, by yielding an universal, steady, and cheerful obedience to his authority ; and imitated as an example and pattern of every Christian temper and practice. If we do so, we shall never fall into scandalous schisms, which are the disgrace of our religious profession ; or, having fallen, shall soon rise again.

Instead of enlarging further on the antidote and cure of schisms ; I shall collect (without much concern about order) a few striking passages from the word of God, which may furnish suitable cautions, directions, and motives on the head.

Phil. ii. 1, 2, 3, 4. 'If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels of mercies ; fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife, or vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.' 2 Cor. xiii. 11. 'Finally, brethren, farewell : be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace ; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.' Rom. xiv. 19. 'Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.' Rom. xv. 5. 'Now the God of patience and consolation, grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus.' Rom. xvi. 17, 18. 'Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned ; and avoid them. For they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly ; and by good words and fair speeches

'speeches deceive the hearts of the simple,' Acts iv. 32. 'And the
 'multitude of them that believed, were of one heart, and of one
 'soul: neither said any of them, that ought of the things, which
 'he possessed, was his own, but they had all things common.'
 Eph. iv. 31, 32. 'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and
 'clamour, and evil-speaking be put away from you, with all
 'malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, for-
 'giving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath for-
 'given you.' Matth. xviii. 21, 22. 'Then came Peter to him,
 'and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I
 'forgive him? till seven times? Jesus said unto him, I say not
 'unto thee, Until seven times: but, until seventy times seven.'
 Mark xi. 25, 26. 'And when ye stand, praying, forgive, if ye
 'have ought against any: that your Father also which is in hea-
 'ven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not for-
 'give, neither will your Father which is in heaven, forgive your
 'trespasses.' Rom. xiv. 13. 'Let us not therefore judge one
 'another any more; but judge this rather, that no man put a
 'stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.'
 Rom. xv. 1, 2. 'We then that are strong, ought to bear the in-
 'firmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one
 'of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.' 1 Cor. xiii.
 4.—7. 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not;
 'charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself
 'unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, think-
 'eth no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the
 'truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things,
 'endureth all things.' Gal. vi. 1, 2. 'Brethren, if a man be
 'overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one
 'in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be
 'tempted. Bear ye one anothers burdens, and so fulfil the law
 'of Christ.' Col. iii. 12, 13. 14. 'Put on therefore, (as the
 'elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness,
 'humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing
 'one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a
 'quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.
 'And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond

‘of perfectness,’ 1 Tim. vi. 3. 4. 5. ‘If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.’ 2 Tim. ii. 16. 17. ‘But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus.’ Tit. iii. 9. ‘Avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.’ 1 John iv. 1. ‘Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.’

Many more texts might be added to the same effect, were I not apprehensive that it might be looked on as a tedious expence of time, to write or read them. O! the degeneracy of human taste, which loathes heavenly manna, and prefers lying vanities, and idle speculations! The copious variety of scripture on this topic, is a solid proof of its essential importance; and of the strong bias in the human mind to a schismatical temper.* This, however, I may confidently aver, that no man, whose conscience is enlightened, impressed, and influenced by these precious truths, will either begin or continue a schism in the church. ‘A good tree will bear good fruit,’ Matth. vii. 15.—20. If the schism

* “The truth is,” (says Dr. Wither Spoon, in his farewell-discourse, delivered at Paisley, in April and May, 1768.) “there is no disorder in a church, that is harder to deal with, than a spirit of contention. Other sins may be reproved with severity, and you will be supposed to be in the exercise of your duty when doing so; but this will not allow itself to be reproved, because it will not confess itself to be a crime, and is therefore, often exasperated, by the attempts to heal it. You may see sometimes a man of strife cover all, under a flaming profession of religion; and yet conduct it in such a manner, that we may say of him, as the servants of Nabal said of their master; he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him.” *Witherspoon’s Sermons*, Vol. 2d. p. 212.

extends to the whole or the greater part of a church; censure does not seem to be the proper means of healing the body all over diseased. Though the apostle blames the Corinthians for their divisions about their teachers, and about the Lord's supper; it is remarkable, he does not enjoin them to draw the sword of discipline, but to reform by repentance, and returning to their first love. But if it appear, that the breach is caused by one, or by a few only; the rule is plain, Rom. xvi. 17. 'I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.'

C H A P. XXII.

Of Separation from a Church.

WHAT has been just now observed, on the head of schism, is intended to state it in a true scripture-light, that the world may see with their own eyes, what is the true idea affixed to the term by the Holy Ghost, and consequently the vulgar mistake of denominating that a schism, which is far unlike. How ordinarily do we find Popish writers charging schism on Protestants, and those Protestants who have a legal establishment, laying the very same thing to the charge of Dissenters. Alas! how easily are men pleased with the sound of words which carry an invidious meaning, in drawing up an indictment against their neighbours? We have seen that schism is properly a division among those who stand in one connection of fellowship: but where the difference is carried so far, that the parties concerned entirely break up all communion with one another, and go into distinct connections, for obtaining the general ends of that religious fellowship which they once did, but now do not carry on and pursue with united endeavours, as one church joined in the bonds of individual society; where this is the case, it is undeniable, there is something very different from a schism; it is no longer a schism in, but a separation from, the body.

In some cases, I believe, there may be a disjoining of particular religious connections, without a fault on any side: the general rules of prudence and duty, in concurrence with providential circumstances, sometimes direct to this as a prudent and necessary

step. Is a congregation overgrown in numbers, so that it cannot conveniently assemble in one place, to join in all the ordinances of general and special communion? It is evident, that to form another congregation, is very commendable, in such circumstances. Do the congregations in one communion, lie so far distant from one another, that their elders cannot assemble, on necessary occasions, for the exercise of discipline, among their flocks, in a presbyterial capacity, without neglecting some duty bound on them, by the laws of nature, or the office in which God hath placed them? Reason would, that they should be parted into such divisions, as are more convenient for answering the ends of edification to their people.

But there are other separations, which imply a fault upon some side; either the fault lies at the door of the persons who *separate themselves*; or, it is chargeable on the *persons from whom the separation is made*. In the first case, it is a sin to leave the communion of a church: and in the last case, it is a sin to *continue* in it. It constitutes an essential part of our plan, to endeavour to set forth both these cases, in a just and defensible light.

S E C T. I.

That it is an heinous crime, in some circumstances, to separate from a particular church, is as strongly asserted, and as clearly proved, in the word of God, as any thing can be. Jude 19. 'These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.' 1 John ii. 19. 'They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us.' The words used by Jude are [*ἀποδιόριζοντες ἑαυτοὺς*]. Mr. Jenkyn on the place observes, "That this word [*ἀποδιόριζοντες*] (separating), may signify *the unbounding* of a thing, and the removing of a thing, "from those bounds and limits wherein it was set and placed, " (for the words [*ἐπιζω*] and [*διόριζω*] signify, to terminate or circumscribe a thing within limits and bounds; and the preposition [*απο*] added to it, may import the taking away, or emptying a thing from those bounds or limits wherein it was contained). This interpretation of making themselves *bound-*
" *less,*

"*lesi*, doth both agree to the word, and to the context." He adds, "According to another interpretation, the word [*αἰσχρο-μιζομεν*] imports, the parting and separating of one thing from another, by bounds and limits put between them; and the putting of bounds and limits for distinction, between several things, it being (thus) a resemblance taken from fields or countries, which are distinguished and parted from each other, by certain boundaries and landmarks set up to that end." Thus that judicious author, who must be allowed to be no contemptible critic. According to the first of these significations, such persons are marked as do not submit to the rules of church-order and discipline, but cast off all restraints, that they may walk at lawless liberty: according to the last, it describes those who set up limits about their own party and faction, to make a distinction of themselves from all others; and in both, or either of these cases, without proper attention to the directions of the Holy Ghost, but with a professed design of maintaining some forbidden peculiarity, relative to faith or practice, which affects the edification and order of the gospel-church.

I apprehend, all that can be said on this causeless, and therefore sinful separation, may be reduced to two heads. Either men will not conform to the terms of faith and practice, set up by Christ for a standard of church-fellowship; or, they will make an addition to, or alteration in that divine system, an essential condition of their having communion with other churches, and Christians. In either of these cases, a separation is groundless and wicked.

(1.) Professed Christians are guilty of making a sinful separation, when they go out from a church which aims at conformity to that system of faith and practice, which Christ hath set up to be a standard of church-communion, that they may be at liberty, without fear or restraint, to do what seems to be right in their own eyes. The light of reason is sufficient to assure us, that society cannot subsist without order, and that order cannot be maintained, without a seasonable and vigorous application of constitutional regulations: if these are once set aside, no rational security remains for the preservation of the being of that constitution;

stitution ; and every prospect of usefulness and comfort, is for ever blasted. There is a most excellent order appointed in the church, which is the house of the God of heaven ; an order infinitely wise, and altogether wholesome, and all the upright in heart shall follow it : they may have different views, concerning the constitutional maxims of the kingdom of Christ ; but whereunto they have attained in the knowledge of them from the word of righteousness, they will endeavour, through grace, to walk by the same rule, and to follow that which is good. But where men, neither awed by the authority of God, nor constrained by the love of Christ, nor led by the Spirit of truth, cast off this yoke and make void the divine law, and cast off their religious connections, that they may walk unrestrained, in the light of their own eyes, that they may handle the word of God deceitfully, or hold the truth in unrighteousness, we dare not say less, and we cannot say worse, of them, than what is contained in these expressions, They go out from us, separating themselves without a cause.

(2.) These, who make some addition to, or alteration in the scripture-system of faith, worship, or discipline, an essential condition of continuing their fellowship with other churches or Christians, are justly chargeable with the crime of making a needless separation. That this is sometimes done, is notorious ; and that it is done against all reason, might be made appear, with all the evidence of demonstration. But it is to be hoped, Britons are not so far lost to generous sentiments of liberty, as to seek a proof of a truth, which is countenanced by the same principles of noble and just thinking, which demonstrate the superior excellency of our civil system. An injured subject, at a lower bar, may bring his cause to the supreme legislature, by orderly steps, and obtain redress, in case of oppression, or imposition by inferiors. We must first imagine the higher powers deficient in justice, and attention to the appealed cause, before we can suppose they would justify a decision, which does not correspond with the spirit and design of established laws : but if the inferior court should assume the power of legislation, and openly claim it as a point of right, would the legislature esteem itself honoured, or even safe, to indulge such an assumed power ? No, surely ;
this

this licentious wanton abuse of trust, in applying laws, would doubtless meet with the severest check : and no wonder, for it strikes at once at the nerves of government, and the dearest interests of the subject. Apply this reasoning to the present business, and it is hoped, it will appear pertinent and convincing. If we put the case in another light, and I know not what should hinder us to suppose things which are supposable ; the absurdity of separation from the church, in this way, will be still more evident. Let us imagine, a part of a common-wealth, or a number of subjects forming an association on such a plan as this, that they will new-model the whole constitution, and at least will deny their countenance to all their fellow-subjects, who will not consent to their terms. By doing so, they, upon the matter, renounce allegiance to the legislature, and connections with fellow-subjects. Where like measures are pursued in the church, a separation is made.

The persons who separate themselves, on one or other of these accounts, may, without an imputation of slander, be pronounced sensual, having not the Spirit of Jesus influencing them to such a step. The blame lies wholly on themselves.

S E C T. II.

But as the crime of separation is sometimes imputable to them who revolt from a church, and in these circumstances is their sin ; so it is not seldom chargeable on the church from which the separation is made ; and in these circumstances, it is the duty of the members, to separate, not to touch the unclean thing, and to come out from among them, 2 Cor. vi. 17. Every instance of defection, error, and misconduct, will not justify separation from a church. To suppose it would, is a principle of the most pernicious tendency in society, and must infallibly unhinge its whole settlements, and throw every thing into disorder and confusion. I am apt to think, the character of that church, from which her members may warrantably and honourably separate, should have a very great and visible likeness to that of a private member, that may, upon scripture-warrants, be cut off from church-fellowship. The church is made up of individuals ; and where communion might be safely kept up with the individuals,

viduals, I am at a loss to see what would be sufficient to justify a separation from the whole. It is mutually agreed, that it is not so much the enormity of an irregular and offensive deed, as the appearing badness of the prevailing temper, which warrants the church to put away a member, from among them: for the same reason I apprehend, it is not so much the glaring impropriety, and even iniquity of some one or more judicial decisions, which will lay a foundation for leaving the communion of a particular church, as the appearing badness of her principles. In the case of an offending individual, a bad temper must appear one of two ways; either by a course of behaviour which discovers the pleasure which the man finds in his way; or by incorrigibleness, while proper means are used to awaken an humbling conviction of some particular fact: the last is as convincing a proof of a bad temper as the first, Matth. xviii. 15.—18. And I persuade myself, there must be some similar discoveries of the bad principles of a church, before any of her members can, with a good conscience, forsake her fellowship. Either,

1. A continued disregard, at least, cool indifference to the faith, obedience, and fellowship of the gospel which they have received, must be so plain and evident, that an impartial bystander shall, so to speak, hear the language of it in his heart, saying, The love of the truth, and the edification of the church, are not the ruling aims and motives which direct their measures. Where this is the case, it is too plain, the prevailing party have forgot upon what express doctrines and duties a profession of Christianity is established, *viz.* To hold the head, even Christ;—to deny self;—to follow holiness;—and to follow the things which make for peace, and the things whereby one may edify another. And these foundations being disregarded, what comfort, peace, purity, and useful fellowship, can be maintained? If the smaller part will cleave to the faith once delivered to the saints, they must forsake a communion, which without giving up with present duty and a good conscience, they cannot keep. Or,

2. Incorrigibleness, and refusing to receive instruction and reproof, when offered with that modest warmth of dutiful respect and faithful zeal, which the genius of Christianity so naturally dictates,

dictates, is a sufficient reason of deserting a communion, where truth is perverted, order broken through, and the honour of the Redeemer insulted, by practices disgraceful to Christianity. But here we are carefully to mind the great weakness of human nature, which is remarkably disposed to take up and magnify offences beyond their due bounds, and to disregard, nay, reject with contempt, all reasonable satisfaction. Under a conviction of this, we should be jealous, lest we speak wickedly for God, and lay to our brethren's charge things which they know not, by interpreting their conduct to be obstinate, and incorrigible, when it will, in fair construction, perhaps bear no such sense. At the same time, it cannot be denied, that in some cases, a backsliding church is deaf to remonstrances, and prone to revolt more and more. Several circumstances may determine our judgments in drawing such conclusions, without any danger of a mistake. An instance or two will fully answer my purpose. Suppose, then,

1^{mo}, A constitutional remonstrance is respectfully offered, but either not read, or if heard, not regarded, so as to receive any answer. Or,

2^{do}, Remonstrances are forbid to be entered into the records of court. Or,

3^{to}, Public warnings against deviations from constitutional principles, are discouraged. . Or,

4^{to}. The persons, who state a plea to the people against unconstitutional opinions, and procedures, are obliged, either to withdraw their warning, or suffer such a punishment, as the ruling party judge expedient, to honour their own decisions, and terrify others from every thing of the kind.

In any, or all of these cases, it is vain to imagine, that a church will secure the nature, and answer the ends, of her constitution. This supposition places her in a light, which cannot be reconciled to that liberty wherewith Christ hath made her free.

To continue in a communion conducted upon this plan, is neither honourable nor prudent. *Not honourable*, because her members are denied the privilege of free and honest men, to act with a proper spirit of generous liberty, in supporting, and rescuing their constitution. *Not prudent*, because in such a case, the

constitution is betrayed by tame silence, and its foundations effectually razed.

A separation proceeding on such grounds, is not made from the *constitution*, its *principles*, or adherents; but, being made by the smaller number, is to be construed a *resolved attachment*, (under the inconveniencies attending an overpowered minority, who choose to suffer, that they may not sin), unto the constitution, which, with concern, they see rendered useless by the weight of power diverted into a dangerous channel.

I presume, that after what has been now observed in the general, it will appear altogether superfluous, to enter minutely into an exact list of the just causes of separation from a Christian church: for, besides the difficulty, not to say impossibility, of doing so; it is evident, they must be resolved into one or other of these particulars. Either, (1.) The church shews a continued indifference about the faith, obedience, worship, and government, which she has received on the authority of the scriptures. Or, (2.) She resents, with severity and oppression, the dutiful remonstrances of her members, who seek redress of some evil complained of in her procedures, as contrary to her received scriptural principles, and enjoins upon them, a blind and silent submission. I cannot imagine a case, which will not fall under one or other of these heads.

C H A P. XXIII.

Of the Communion of Church-members.

IN treating on this interesting part of our subject, the following order seems most suitable and easy.

1. To explain the nature, and essential duties, of church-communion.
2. To consider the weighty and binding obligations, which may convince us, that it is a reasonable service.
3. To represent the excellency of it, as an exalted part of our religion.
4. To answer the objections which are made against it.
5. To lay down some plain and proper rules for the comfortable and edifying conduct of church-members in that fellowship. And,
6. To

6. To urge the diligent cultivation of this duty, by some close and important considerations.

This order, which is observed in a set of celebrated lectures, is both natural and accurate: it is a just arrangement, and exhausts the subject.

S E C T. I.

The first thing to be attempted, is an explanation of the nature, and essential duties, of church-communion. Having already prevented myself, by a pretty large account of the nature of church-communion, I shall only observe at this time, that it invariably means, a society of Christians joined together in professing the same faith, and walking by the same rule, in order to their mutual advantage and edification. To be a professed Christian, and to be in communion with a visible professing church, are not phrases of the same import, whatever some would tell us. It is just as reasonable to say, that because man is a social and reasonable being, therefore every man is a good member of society. The consequence is not good, because we see in fact many prostitute and renounce the dictates of reason, to do violence to all social obligations. The idea which first presents itself to the mind, when we hear of a man of such a corporation, commonwealth, or society, is, that he unites with his fellow-members, in mutual endeavours, to promote the common good of the whole, by a behaviour which is suitable to his station in it. We describe the very nature of church-communion, when we say, that Christians are joined together in faith and practice, and unite in walking together in all appointed institutions of divine worship and service, for their mutual comfort and welfare, in every thing which pertains to vital, powerful, and sincere religion.

The duties of this fellowship are many and important. I cannot make up a complete list; for here, as in every thing else, the law of God is exceeding broad. I shall beg leave to select the following specimen only, which contains an unfinished sketch of some comprehensive generals, which include the several particulars most nearly related, and subordinate, to each. And,

1. They are called to endeavour, by every warrantable means,

to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, Eph. iv. 3. This is earnestly recommended, Phil. ii. 2. 3. 'Be like-minded, 'having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let 'nothing be done through strife, or vain-glory, but in lowliness 'of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.' The utmost caution is necessary to prevent useless controversies, warm disputes, efforts of ambition, and other corrupt tempers, which threaten to disquiet the church, and destroy her peace. While we observe the infirmities of men, and survey the imperfections common to ourselves and others; it is only an act of common justice, to make the indulgent allowances to others, which are so necessary to be made for us, to support our interest in *their* favourable opinion. Nothing is more earnestly recommended by Christ to his followers, than love without dissimulation, and harmony of heart, word, and conduct: surely, because they ought daily to cultivate it, with the utmost care; and endeavour, as much as possible, to promote it, by fervent prayer, an even temper, and a circumspect walk. Phil. iii. 15, 16. 'Let 'us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in 'any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this 'unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let 'us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things.' Jealousies, suspicions, malice, envy, devouring words, and untender conduct, which wears the face of cool reserve, ingratitude, selfishness, or design, are commonly attended with shocking consequences, even to civil societies, which are formed on schemes of interest, and convenience; but scarce ever fail to consume religious societies, where love is the uniting, and strengthening 'bond of perfectness. Let us therefore follow the things that 'make for peace, and the things whereby one may edify another.'

2. Another duty incumbent on Christians who are united in the same religious connections, is to bear one anothers burdens, Gal. vi. 2. To bear the burdens of our fellow-men, is an office of humanity, no less natural than politic; to bear the burdens of our fellow-Christians is a sublime part of the offices enjoined upon the churches by the Holy Ghost. Burdened Christians we have

have always with us, as well as the poor; and of course we have always an opportunity, and call, to exercise ourselves mutually in this labour of love; for 'we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.' One groans under the load of censorious reproach, which breaks his heart; another is bowed down under the weight of bodily infirmities; a third is destitute of the conveniences which are necessary to render life tolerably comfortable; another is sinking under a wounded spirit, grievous temptations, and black despair; others feel the severe smart of the rod of persecution, or the more penetrating sting of keen remorse. In any, or all of these circumstances, it is an hateful, unkind thing, to withhold the friendly assistance, which the case of our brother so much requires. It is recorded for our caution, not as an example for our imitation, 'That Edom stood on the other side, and looked on the day of Jacob, in the day that he became a stranger,' Obad. 11, 12. The Spirit of God calls this behaviour by its true name, 'violence against Jacob,' vers. 10. And you know that the wrath and curse of God are revealed from heaven against Israel, because they were not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph, Amos vi. 1. 6.

But though these are weighty, they are not the heaviest burdens, which we are enjoined to bear, at the hand of one another. Suppose a brother fall into an erroneous notion, or an immoral act, like one caught by surprise, before he was aware, through unwatchfulness, ignorance, human frailty, plausible insinuations, the example of others, or the power of temptation; so that he becomes like a dislocated member in the body: I ask, what treatment he is entitled to, from his fellow-members? Must he be hastily condemned, haughtily despised, and if not excluded, yet regarded with the most sovereign contempt? If general conduct was an infallible guide to the true meaning of the word of God, we might with all the certainty imaginable conclude, that he was very well used by such treatment, and lay under strong obligations to acknowledge, with the sincerest gratitude, that he was not marked out to a sorer punishment. But how does this egregious blunder appear, when set in the light of the divine law? 'Restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also
' be

‘be tempted: bear ye one another’s burdens.’ This is the will of God, concerning such a case. To inform his judgment, and deal closely with his conscience, with meekness and patience, tenderness and compassion, to sympathize and bear with, to pray for, and assist him, is rather an act of justice, than generosity, in his fellow-members. ‘If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. No man ever yet hated his own flesh.’ Let it never be the reproach of professing church-members, to be at the same time *rebels* against God, and *without natural affection* among themselves. Who, but a barbarous, inhuman wretch, could see even an enemy’s ox or ass, fallen into a pit, or sunk under a load, and refuse to contribute all possible and necessary assistance to relieve it? But doth God, or should we, care as much for these *animals*, as for *men*, especially for THE REDEEMED from among men!

3. A third duty binding on those who are united in Christian fellowship, is, to endeavour, mutually, to prevent all occasion of stumbling at one another’s walk and behaviour. This is of the utmost consequence to the comfort and edification of the church. Mutual confidence and affection, resulting from seasonable and satisfying evidences of soundness in the faith, and holiness of conversation, are the strength and comfort of religious society. It is our interest and our duty to endeavour to maintain both, and to use every means in our power, to obtain so valuable an end. How particularly express is the commandment of the God of heaven, on this head? 1 Cor. x. 32, 33. and chap. xi. 1. ‘Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.’ A dreadful wo is pronounced to the world, because of offences, Matth. xviii. 7. Therefore, as no man should judge another, by forcing constructions on his words and actions; so we are bound to judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother’s way, Rom. xiv. 13. It is the duty of church-members, to watch over, and provoke one another to love and good works: and the insolent language,

‘Am

‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ better becomes the lips of a murdering savage Cain, than the mouth of Christ’s disciple. Suppose then, a tender and humble Christian shall imagine, from something which he has heard or seen, or from some credible information which he has got, that one, or more, or many, of his brethren, have, in some instance, turned out of the way; he cannot be faithful to God, to his own conscience, or to his brother, if he do not embrace the most early opportunity of informing him, what he has reason to suspect, with all the faithfulness and affection of a friend. This instance of brotherly friendship, instead of being resented with bitterness and dislike, is entitled to the best construction, and most generous returns, which unfeigned gratitude can dictate. This suspicion which occasions the offence, must either respect some unscriptural notion, or some immoral action. View it in any of these lights, and still the commandment is, ‘That no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.’ If it be a matter of opinion, or an article of doctrine, wherein a brother is supposed to have erred, the duty which he owes his offended brother, is to sanctify the Lord God in his heart, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope which is in him, with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that whereas, any speak evil of him, as of an evil-doer, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse his good conversation in Christ, 1 Pet. iii. 15, 16. If it is a matter of fact, wherein a brother is alledged to have departed from his duty, I cannot see that the above reason loses any thing of its weight, to oblige him to come to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God, John iii. 21. If the church-member, whose conduct or sentiments are doubtful, shall absolutely decline to give any satisfactory answer to those who ask an explanation of them, but insolently demand a proof, and refuse any explanation, but what is necessary in his own defence, against a legal proof; now walketh he not edifyingly. For,

It is a point always to be supposed, that these who are joined in one communion, as church-members, are agreed in their general views of opinions and practices, and look on them, either

as warrantable, or as sinful, or as doubtful, so far doubtful at least among themselves, that different persons having a different faith, on particular points, and a different practice accordingly, shall be borne with by all.

Now it cannot be questioned, that it is mutually the duty of people, in that close union, to strengthen and support a favourable opinion of their good conversation in Christ. The man who aims most steadily to pursue this course, acts most to the edification of his Christian brethren.

Every erroneous sentiment, and evil action, imputed to a church-member, (whether he is really innocent or guilty), is an offence to all Christians, who come to know any thing of the imputation, and to whose minds, in that particular, the appearances of evil are more weighty than the appearances of innocence. I cannot see, that the offence is less in such a supposed case, than it would be to each individual, on his suffering some personal injury at the hand of the offender. In the case which I am supposing, it is free of all just suspicion, of being debased by revenge or malice.

The light of nature, and the law of nations, allow every member of society, that is suspected of being or doing what puts it out of his power to employ his abilities with benefit and reputation, to use every method of just defence, to stop the mouth of calumny, to remove jealousy, and to establish his character. And divine revelation destroys none of the privileges granted and secured to mankind, by an instinct which has the force of law, and is indeed one work of the law, which is naturally written on man's heart.

Therefore the man who thinks himself above any obligation to satisfy his fellow-members, is a rebel against nature, reason, and social obligations. Through breaking the divine law, he likewise dishonoureth God. A few instances shall serve for examples of this. It is the will of God, that the light of his people should so shine before men, that others seeing their good works, may glorify their Father which is in heaven, Matth. v. 16.—It is his will, that by the being ready to answer [*προς ἀπολογία*], we should put to shame these that falsely accuse our good conversation

sation in Christ, 1 Pet. iii. 15, 16.—He blames these who walk not charitably; and destroy his comfort, peace, and edification, for whom Christ died, Rom. xiv. 15.—He obliges us to shew one another, that our faith is vital, and efficacious, by works in the fight of men, Jam. ii. 18. He solemnly enjoins, that we be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, amongwhom Christians should constantly shine, as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, Phil. ii. 15, 16.

When these things are put together, I apprehend the insulting defiance of these weak minds, (who, by the by, are not always the most unexceptionable in their own character), will appear in its own colours, as an opinion reproved and condemned by the fullest evidence, on a fair trial.

It may be, some will reply, "There is no difference between your sentiments and the doctrine of Rome, which obliges a man to accuse himself, and make auricular confession to a priest." Perhaps some of my readers will be of opinion, that such an objection is not plausible enough to deserve any notice: I own I am of their mind. But for the fullest satisfaction of these that think otherwise, I beg leave to represent faithfully, that article of the Romish creed, concerning auricular confession in order to absolution. It is in the fifth chapter of the 14th session of the council of Trent. They say, "The absolution of a priest is to be considered as a judicial action, in which a sentence is to be pronounced by him in quality of a judge; this judgment he could not exercise, without taking cognisance of the cause; nor maintain equity in injoining punishments, if the penitents should declare to him their sins only in general, and not in a special and particular manner. Therefore they ought in confession to recount all mortal sins, even the most secret, of which they are conscious after a diligent discussion; and likewise all these particular circumstances which alter the kind of sin." This is the vile and impious doctrine of that church, which all true Protestants hold in just detestation. But what concord hath it with the doctrines of divine revelation, which forbid us to suffer sin, already known to us; or, which an-

swers the same purpose, imputed to our brother, with some probable circumstances which support the imputation; I say, which forbid us to suffer that sin to lie upon him? and command us, in any wise, to reprove him? If we are ourselves to abstain from all appearance of evil; we are certainly bound to examine into, and reprove, what has the appearance of evil in others. If it be granted, that it is the duty of Christians to confess their faults one to another, in all cases of a personal nature, which can scarce be doubted, as the Holy Ghost speaks so expressly on this head, Jam. v. 16; then all I desire is granted; for the only reason that can be alledged for confessing to him as an offended Christian brother, will equally oblige to confess to as many offended Christian brethren, as know, and are offended at, the known fault. It is on this account that a secret offence, when satisfaction is sought, but not obtained in a private regular way, becomes a general and public one, Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17.

I am far from thinking, that any man is bound to accuse himself: but whereas all civilized nations have wisely appointed punishments for these who refuse to plead to a legal indictment; I think the crime is attended with very singular aggravations, when Christians affect to glory in their contempt of every objection, to their principles and conduct, which is not supported with the evidence of proof.

Condescensions of this kind will never lessen a worthy character; but will reflect a lustre on what is otherwise amiable: they will prevent occasions of reproach to a particular person, and to religion in general; they cannot fail to procure ease in our own minds, respect from others, and painful disappointment to our enemies. But enough of this.

4. A fourth class of comprehensive duties incumbent on church-members, are contained in that piece of the history of the apostolic church in its infant-state, Acts ii. 42. 'The disciples continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.'

To say that we have faith, that we are called by the name of the Lord, and that we will obey his voice, is so far good; but does not come up to the more exalted character of the consistent social Christian,

tian, who does honour to his profession by his daily conversation. He does not seek a protection in the name, but like the primitive converts, he aims at the powerful practice of every branch of Christian duty; he is not content with a name that he lives, but, with firm resolution, and unshaken courage, he cleaves unto, and stedfastly perseveres in, the faith and profession of the doctrine of Christ, preached unto Abraham more darkly in prophetic intimations and under figures, but more clearly by the apostles, who testify, that God hath actually performed the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which he had sworn to the fathers from the days of old; that he hath sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law; that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world; that he died for our sins, and rose again for our justification; that he ascended on high, and received gifts for men, and even for rebels; that he sitteth at the right hand of God, and ruleth in the midst of his enemies; that he ever liveth to make intercession for the transgressors; that he is the alone head of the church visible and invisible; that his church is his kingdom, and is not of this world; that he will come in his own, and in his Father's glory, to judge the quick and the dead.—These are articles of the apostles doctrine, which are supported with the fullest evidence to our faith, and are of the utmost importance to the edification and comfort of the body of Christ. We do well to take heed unto them, and to continue stedfastly in them.

Like these primitive disciples, we should *enter into, and stedfastly continue in, Christian fellowship*. If men enter into it, with a distinct apprehension of its true nature, and a full conviction of its great importance and manifold advantages, we need not fear that they will be like a wave of the sea, which is driven of the wind, and tossed. Stedfast continuance in the dutiful performance of all offices of brotherly love, is an ornament to the Christian character, and never more so, than when it triumphs over some ungrateful provocations. But to discontinue religious fellowship, before the essential conditions of it are irreparably profaned, is below the man, and inconsistent with the Christian.

Like these primitive converts, we should *stedfastly continue in*

breaking of bread, or, in celebrating the *Lord's supper*, as the memorial of his death. By doing so, we profess our faith in Christ, and our hope in the favour of God through him. We shew his death, till he come. As in duty bound, we thereby do publicly declare, and openly avow to God, to our own consciences, and to all the world the death of our Lord and Saviour, as that alone which we depend upon for pardon and reconciliation, and for a gracious performance of all the promises of the new covenant, unto complete salvation. By this we publish to all around us, that we are not ashamed of, but glory in, Jesus who was crucified, how much soever the blinded Jews, the learned Greeks, the rational Deists, or any sort of unbelievers, may despise him. Being many, we are one bread, and have our fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, by one Spirit, and with one another in them, by this ordinance.

Another duty of saints is, to continue stedfastly *in prayer*, as these disciples have set us an example. This duty must be performed in the secret closet, in the family, and in the public assemblies. Hereby we offer up the desires of our souls to God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, by the help of the Holy Ghost; with humble confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgements of his mercies. We may judge of the importance of this duty, from the frequently repeated and express commandments about it. It is not only a service to be performed for ourselves, but Christians must *pray one for another*, Jam. v. 16. 'If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and God shall give him life for him that sinneth not unto death,' 1 John v. 16. The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite; 'My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends.—My servant Job shall *pray for you*, for him will I accept,' Job xlii. 7, 8. Not to pray for others, is *uncharitableness*; not to desire and expect it from others, is *pride*: two, yea many, are better than one. Joint striving in prayer, mutually for the good of each other, makes the work prosper. 'I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree upon earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven,' Matth. xviii. 19.

5. The last head of duties which I shall mention, refers to the communion of saints, in things which pertain to the *help, comfort, and peace of this life*. Every civil relation should be consecrated to the Lord their God. Every man, wherein he is called, should therein abide with God, 1 Cor. vii. 24.—These who marry, may do it only in the Lord, 1 Cor. vii. 39.—The married should live together, as heirs of the grace of life, 1 Pet. iii. 7.—Old men must not be rebuked, but intreated as fathers; and younger men, as brethren: the elder women, as mothers; and the younger, as sisters, with purity: widows, that are widows indeed, must be honoured, 1 Tim. v. 1. 2. 3.—Husbands, must love their wives, as Christ loveth the church, Eph. v. 25.—Wives must submit themselves unto their own husbands, as unto the Lord, Eph. v. 22.—Children must obey their parents in the Lord: for this is right, Eph. vi. 1.—Parents must bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, Eph. vi. 4.—Servants must be obedient to them that are their masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good-will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good any man doth, the same he shall receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And masters must do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that their Master also is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him, Eph. vi. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9.—Magistrates, that rule over men, must be just, ruling in the fear of God, 2 Sam. xxiii. 3. And subjects must be in subjection, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake, Rom. xiii. 5.—Ministers must watch for their people, as these that shall give an account: and their people must obey them that are over them, and submit themselves, Heb. xiii. 16.—These that are set to be governments in the church, must rule well: and the church must render them double honour, 1 Tim. v. 17.—The poor must be taken care of, and the deacons that give, must give with simplicity and liberality, Acts vi. 1. 2. 3. Rom. xii. 8.—Neighbours and equals must be kindly affectionate one towards another, with
brotherly

brotherly love in honour preferring one another, Rom. xii. 10. : rejoicing with them that do rejoice, and weeping with them that weep : being of the same mind, one towards another ; not minding high things, but condescending to men of low degree, Rom. xii. 15. 16. : doing nothing through strife, or vain-glory ; but in lowliness of mind, each esteeming others better than himself ; not looking every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others, Phil. ii. 3. 4. —In a word, among all, there should be unfeigned kindness of behaviour.—A law of kindness, and gentleness of speech unto all men, in the lips ;—and undissembled friendship, faithfulness, and simplicity, in the whole of our conduct. We should carefully cherish and promote every social, humane, and edifying temper ; and with equal care prevent or suppress whatever has the remotest tendency to destroy social good.

The subject is copious, and almost endless ; but the *several classes of Christian offices and social duties* which I have collected, seem to include the greater part of them. I shall therefore dismiss this head, and come in the next place,

S E C T. II.

Secondly, To lay down the *weighty obligations* which bind church-members, to cultivate Christian-fellowship upon the scriptural plan.

The task appears easy, and perhaps may seem needless : I wish it were so, and that every one who makes such a profession, were under such a conviction of the necessity of this duty, that I could hope to add nothing to it, and that there were no occasion to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance. But to suppose this, would be an excess of charity, and would reproach that earnestness, with which the Holy Ghost enjoins, repeats, and enforces the indispensable obligation of the duty. I shall offer such arguments as occur, under two general heads ; the light of nature, and scripture-revelation.

1. I would argue from *the light of nature*. Concerning this the apostle speaks, Rom. i. 19. 20. and ii. 14. And oftener than once, he quotes Heathen writers, not only when he is vindicating a truth of natural religion ; but when he is discoursing upon the doctrine

doctrine of the resurrection to a Christian church, Acts xvii. 28. 1 Cor. xv. 33. The scripture binds us to a *most reasonable service*, which recommends itself to our understanding, with the fullest evidence of truth; to our will, with the most agreeable satisfactions, and to our conscience, with the most solemn and irresistible authority. *Such* are these duties, of church-communion; they are built on eternal reason, and the relation of things. I speak of the general duties, which are such, as reason, and the light of nature, seem to dictate, or approve, in all voluntary religious societies whatsoever.

The light of nature is sufficient to convince us, that it is not good for man, who is formed for social services and happiness, to be alone;—that society improves a religious character, as iron sharpeneth iron;—that the man who disregards the society best suited to his own character, is a rebel against nature, his own interest, and the welfare of mankind;—and, finally, that every branch of the social system should be directed by the general rules and principles which constitute the society.

I conceive, the remark made on this subject, by the very ingenious and devout Dr. Watts, will be found exactly agreeable to these observations. It runs in these words, “If a Deist, who professes nothing but natural religion, once came so far as to receive the Christian faith, and the sacraments, his reason would lead him into almost all the parts of Christian communion, which I have described.” How strong and plain are the foundations, and the grounds of it!

I would not be understood to say more in favour of the light of nature, nor to carry the argument farther, than the Assembly's Confession of faith does, chap. i. sect. 6. “There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence; *N. B.* according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed,” 1 Cor. xi. 13. 14. and xiv. 26. 40. I might add, there is none of the duties of Christian fellowship, which does not, even in the eye of reason, appear highly becoming the general principles of Christianity; so much becoming

coming them, that he would be guilty of a flagrant inconsistency, who would allow *these* principles, and yet reject any of *those* duties.

2. I would argue the obligations to cultivate Christian fellowship, *from the scriptures*. The heads of argument which are suggested in these, are many and various. The emphatic descriptions of the Christian church, called an house, a kingdom, a city, a flock, &c. *suppose* all that we urge. But the forcible considerations collected together, Eph. iv. 3. 4. 5. 6. deserve particular attention. I beg leave to present the reader, with the nervous and solid paraphrase of the great and worthy *Dr. Guise* on the place, who sets the meaning and strength of the argument in a proper light, with that precision which is so peculiar to himself. His words are, "This amiable union ought, by all means, to be cultivated among saints, considering the joint interest and concernment that they have in such excellent things, as direct and oblige them to be united in heart and affection; as, to mention a few remarkable particulars:—*there is one body*;—the catholic church is but one mystical body, of which Christ is the head, and they are all alike members; and therefore they should have the same fellow-feeling, concern, and care, for one another:—*there is one Spirit*,—one and the same divine and holy Spirit, of which they are partakers, who animates, guides, and dwells in the whole mystical body, and in every member of it; in whom he also has wrought the same spirit and temper after his own likeness, who is the Spirit of love and peace; and therefore they ought to act with united hearts, according to his dictates, under his influence, and in resemblance of him; but to have hearts disaffected one to another, is like having two, or more souls, and *that* of contrary dispositions and qualities, in one body:—*the saints are called in one hope of their calling*,—they are called, by grace, to God's kingdom and glory, as the *one summary object* of their hope; and, in their effectual calling, they are made partakers of *one and the same grace* of hope, which terminates on Christ as its only foundation; and therefore they should live in harmony and peace, as heirs together of the grace of life, and expectants of one and the same
" blessed

" blessed inheritance of the saints in light :—*there is one Lord,*
 " Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all true believers, who is the only
 " Mediator, Head, and King of the church; and therefore they
 " ought to unite, as with one heart and soul, in their dependance
 " upon him, in their allegiance, love, and obedience to him, and
 " in their sincere affection to all his subjects, according to the
 " laws of his kingdom :—*there is one faith,*—one and the same
 " rule and doctrine of faith, and one object of it, and one sort of pre-
 " cious faith, which is common to the whole church of Christ;
 " and these are to be entertained and improved by the *same act-*
 " *ings* of faith in every member of it; and therefore this faith
 " should work by love to him, its glorious object, and to one
 " another for his sake :—*there is one baptism,*—the baptism of all,
 " that belong to the church of Christ, is but *one* in its nature,
 " tendency, and design; whether it be considered as the *internal*
 " baptism of the Holy Ghost, by which they are renewed and
 " sanctified; or as the *external* ordinance of baptism with water,
 " which is to be *but once* administered, and by which that spiritual
 " benefit is signified; and they, in token of it, are visibly and
 " solemnly devoted to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and
 " are enrolled in the Christian church, and brought under the
 " strongest bonds, to be entirely and unreservedly the Lord's, in
 " whose *one name*, in opposition to all other gods, they are bap-
 " tized; and therefore they should behave with the utmost una-
 " nimity, in acting up to character, and answering their obliga-
 " tions, according to their holy principles and profession :—*there*
 " *is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all,*
 " *and in you all,*—the covenant God and Father of all sincere be-
 " lievers, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, is but *one*; and they
 " all stand in the nearest relation to him, as his people and his
 " children, who is infinitely above them all in his own nature
 " and perfections, and in his dominion over them; yea, is exalt-
 " ed above all blessing and praise; and whose special influence
 " diffuses through all and every part of the mystical body of
 " Christ, to preserve, govern, and supply them; and who, by
 " his Spirit and grace, dwells in all of them that believe, as in his
 " temple, and works in every one of them that which is well-

“pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ; and therefore they ought to be of one heart and soul, in their acknowledgments, love, and reverence of him, and in their obedience and subjection to him, as their own God and Father; and should love as brethren, and as children, that have one and the same God for your heavenly Father.” It is a pleasant employment to the mind which is attentive to truth, and obedient to the authority of God, to consider, in their beautiful connection, the *examples*, *commands*, and *encouragements*, relative to the communion of saints in church-fellowship, which are so frequent in the scriptures.

It is *exemplified* in such instances as have the force and obligation of a law to direct and bind the conscience. We are compassed about with a great cloud of honourable witnesses. The saints have always been companions of all them that feared God. Their flight has been social, like the huge collection of watery particles that form a cloud, and like the joint assemblage of doves to their windows. They that feared the Lord in all ages, spake often one to another. The first disciples, having gladly received the word, were baptized, and continued stedfastly in fellowship; and such as should be saved, were daily added to them. See also Song i. 7. 8. 9.

The *command* is as express, as the example is clear, Phil. i. 27. ‘Stand fast, with one mind, in one spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel.’ Heb. x. 25. ‘Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the time approaching.’ To lay down, explain, and enforce these weighty obligations, seems to be one principal object pursued through the whole of John’s epistles.

The *encouragements* to this holy fellowship are so many and so weighty, that he that despiseth it, sinneth against his own soul, and lightly esteemeth his own mercies. This will be more evident, when we attend to the—

S E C T. III.

—Third head, which is to display the sublime excellency, and the rich advantages of being joined in religious fellowship with the churches of Christ. Here I cannot express myself better,

ter, than in the words of a celebrated author, [Dr. Watts in Berry-street lectures], he says, "Among other advantages of an agreement for Christian fellowship, I might mention such as these.

"1. It gives courage to every Christian to profess and practise his religion, when many persons are engaged by mutual agreement in the same profession and practice. We do not love to be singular, and to be pointed at by the world, as standing alone, especially in the affairs of God and religion; but when a good company unite themselves together, for such a sacred purpose, this takes away the reproach of singularity; they all strengthen one another's hands in the ways of the Lord, and they bear up with more firmness of heart against the reproaches of the world.

"2. It is more for the particular edification of Christians, that such societies should be formed, where the word of Christ is constantly preached, where the ordinances of Christ are administered, and the religion of Christ is held forth in a social and honourable manner to the world. Hereby every Christian knows where to go to hear the gospel preached, and multitudes are instructed at once in the great things that relate to their eternal peace: hereby those who have known the things of Christ, more easily call to mind what they have learned, and are admonished of their daily duty by the public preacher: here their prayers are united, and their songs of praise; and such an union of prayers and praises is delightful and acceptable to him, who inhabits the praises of Israel, and who has encouraged them to agree in asking mercies from God, and to strive together in prayer. United devotions are much more likely to be successful.

"3. Such an holy fellowship and agreement to walk together in the ways of Christ, is an happy guard against backsliding and apostasy; it is a defence against the temptations of the world, and the defilements of a sinful age. Having given my name up to Christ, in a public manner, how shall I dare to renounce him? Having joined myself to the followers of Christ, how shall I break those bonds, and depart from them,

“ or disgrace that holy fellowship by any known sin? Having
 “ made a public profession of my avowed obedience to Jesus, as
 “ a Lord and King, how can I dare decline his service, or indulge
 “ myself in those iniquities which his word forbids ?

“ 4. Christians thus united together by mutual acquaintance
 “ and agreement, can give each other better assistance in every
 “ thing that relates to religion, whether public or private. They
 “ warm one another’s hearts by mutual holy conversation ; and,
 “ joining hand in hand, add force and strength, assistance and
 “ stability, to their religious designs and endeavours.”

Allow me to add, that this communion is recommended to our regard by two advantageous and engaging excellencies. It prevents much evil, and is productive of much good.

1. To be joined in church-fellowship, is a most excellent preventive of *inconceivable*, and, otherwise, *inevitable mischief*. This might be shewn, by collecting the *manifold inconveniencies* which infallibly attend the man who stands *single*, and *unconnected* in these sacred bonds. A shocking list !—Wo to him that is alone, when he falleth into temptation, sin, adversity, or affliction ! for he hath not another to help him up.—He hath no partner in his distress, and none to stretch out the friendly hand for his assistance : none to administer comfort, and relieve him under his pressing necessities.—How can one be warm alone ! How can he be warm with prudent, judicious, and affectionate zeal ? How can he be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord in all divine institutions ?—An enemy, a thief, a robber, or a deceiver, will easily prevail against *one* ; as the serpent did against Eve, when she was alone : so will sin, Satan, and the world, against the *single* Christian.—The man who is *not* a companion of them that fear God, is in the utmost danger of casting in his lot among sinners, and becoming a companion of fools, and by that means a son of perdition.—I need not say, how effectually the strict and watchful communion of saints in church-fellowship, prevents all these fatal and mischievous evils. Let impartial facts decide between the *single* and the *social* professor of religion. Say, ye masters of sound reason, and candid observers of human conduct, which of them is, in fact, or, which of them may, with the highest probability,

bility, be supposed, best provided against these dangerous and destructive calamities?

2. To be joined in strict fellowship with the churches of Christ, produces *great good* to every individual in that divine connection. Besides the good that a single individual does to the society, which, at the same time, is a solid pleasure to himself; he is in the way to have numberless blessings derived upon his own head, from fellow-members. It is with the highest reason and propriety, that the apostle introduces Christian society into the catalogue of gospel-privileges, Eph. ii. 11.—22. ‘Wherefore remember that ye being in time passed Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision of the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments, contained in ordinances, for to make in himself, of twain, one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom you also are builded together, for an habitation of God through the Spirit.’ And most emphatically, Heb. xii. 22. 23. ‘Ye are come—to the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven.’ Eph. iv. 15. 16. ‘But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom

‘whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by
 ‘that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual
 ‘working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the
 ‘body, unto the edifying of itself in love.’ Example has a
 greater influence than precept; and communion with Christian
 churches gives us the advantage of both these. The divine glories
 of religion are drawn out, and exemplified in their social tem-
 per, spirit, and behaviour, to recommend it, and attract us by
 its beauties: and their communications together, as opportuni-
 ties offer, occasionally, or statedly, spread the favour of the
 knowledge of Christ, and of spiritual things, among the mem-
 bers; they minister grace, and give an happy tincture to one
 another. *There*, many rules of conduct may be learned; *there*,
 the value of an immortal soul, and the preference of heaven and
 glory to all things in this dying world; *there*, the necessity and
 worth of Christ and salvation, and the way of enjoying them
 through faith in him; *there*, the pleasure, beauty, and advantage
 of a spiritual, holy, and heavenly life; and, *there*, the efficacy of
 divine grace in changing a man’s heart and ways, and turning
 them from sin to God,—are practically set before the view in
 various lovely and inviting forms: and, *there*, every one may
 meet with faithful counsellors against the vanities of life, the
 temptations of the world, and the corrupt and dangerous princi-
 ples and practices, errors and looseness of the age in which he
 lives, and of the bad company into which he may fall.

If a man is in danger of being drawn into any corrupt no-
 tions, sinful courses, or injurious snares for soul or body: his
 brethren will be ready to give him good counsel, and hold him
 back, as Abigail did David by her prudent advice, when he was
 going rashly to avenge himself upon Nabal, by putting him, and
 all his males to death. If any member is fallen into straits and
 difficulties, and wants direction in his way; they will consult
 his good, and their lips will dispense wisdom; they will recom-
 mend his case to the Father of lights and of mercies, that he may
 appear for him, as Daniel’s friends desired mercies of the God of
 heaven, that he and his fellows should not perish with the rest
 of the wise-men of Babylon, when the decree of Nebuchadnezzar

was

was gone forth to destroy them. If he grow cool and indifferent toward the good ways of God, and is in danger of forsaking them; they will stir him up to take heed of declensions and apostacies; to follow that which is good, and to cleave with full purpose of heart to the Lord. Social Christians will consider one another, to provoke unto love, and to good works. Thus they strengthen one another's hands, encourage one another's hearts, and give countenance to each other in their religious communion, in their profession of Christ, and in their joint and practical testimony against the vices of the scoffers and profane; and the blessing of God goes along with such society. 'Behold! how good and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments. As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for ever more,' Psa. cxxxiii. Glorious things are spoken of this city of the Lord.

S E C T. IV.

The fourth head leads me to answer some objections which are frequently made against entering into, or improving with ardent zeal, this communion with the people of God, in a church-capacity. So far as I know, they are all reducible to three particulars. It is alledged, that such a communion is *needleless*, *selfish*, and *dangerous*. I shall examine the truth of each of these weighty charges, with some attention.

1. It is confidently pretended, that there is no necessity to enter into close society with any particular church; men may live and die very good Christians without doing so; and they will not blush to produce examples, and challenge, in terms of the highest contempt, any parallel, or at least any superior, character, to be mentioned among the multitudes, that are most rigorously strict in all the duties and offices of social religion.

But, with the leave of these gentlemen, I must observe, that their notions of Christianity, and what forms the divinely amiable character of a true Christian, are commonly false, and al-

ways

ways defective. (1.) *They are commonly false*: the warmest zealots for that latitude of sentiment, which I dislike, usually mean nothing else by Christianity, but an inoffensive, harmless behaviour, attended with the belief of a supreme Being, a divine providence, and a future state; if the person is, moreover benevolent, candid, humane, and useful to society, this is generally thought a great eminence in his religious character; and every thing else is condemned, as an unnecessary, absurd precision, below the notice of exalted minds. It is the misfortune of the lame, that their legs are not equal, and their walking, of course, must be ungraceful: so is a parable in the mouth of fools. These who run down the *necessity* of church-communion, are so inconsistent with themselves, as to allow, that *society* is the proper firmament of a truly religious character. Out of their own mouth they are condemned. Besides, these notions of Christianity are utterly *false*, because they are detached from that essential and vital connection, which true religion necessarily has with the Lord Jesus Christ. And, (2.) It cannot be denied, that every idea we form of Christianity, unconnected with, and *independent on society*, is very defective. Weigh it in a just balance, and make every possible allowance, still it is found wanting, till you throw the exertions of its powerful principles, and the displays of its amiable beauties, in a strict and holy communion, into the scale. Do ye, O Christians, believe the scriptures? I know that ye believe them. Search them without prepossession, and see how large a portion of them is employed in explaining, enforcing, and encouraging the visible communion of saints. How can you answer to God, and your conscience, if you reckon that needless, which the word of God has made necessary? Is man wiser than God? Whatever speaketh not according to the divine testimony, hath no light in it.—But if it be granted, that there are some real, and even eminent Christians, who do not walk in church-fellowship, it will not be a good consequence, that this fellowship is unnecessary, and unprofitable. A very different way of reasoning seems most natural. If they *excel*, under so many disadvantages, how much more *profitable* might they be to themselves and others, if they were joined to, and walking in the faith and order

order of gospel-churches, themselves edified, and edifying others? Suppose an original genius finds out some new and useful discovery, which he communicates to the world; it is very possible, in the next age, a youth of vulgar capacity shall be instructed, even with additional improvements on the first invention, to know really more of it at twenty years of age, than the inventor reached by many years close application of deep thought. Whence is this mighty difference? Because practice excels speculation; and social improvements form mankind to a graceful ease and readiness, for peculiar offices in life. We cannot doubt, but a man of equal genius to the inventor of any art or science, is able to improve on the invention, when he becomes fully master of his subject, though his capacity and application be really no greater. And it is universally confessed, that the useful arts, philosophical knowledge, and civilized manners, have only flourished, where the bonds of society have been most sacred and rational. If a singular exception is produced in this or that age, or in a particular country; it only makes us wish, that that great man had been so happy for himself, and so serviceable to mankind, as we have reason to think he might have been, born in an age of light, and land of liberty. The application is easy.

2. Another thing objected against church-communion among the saints, is this, that it is a *selfish* scheme, calculated to promote and aggrandize a particular interest, where ambition and avarice claim an important share in the direction and management. I am sorry to say, that the manner of managing it, has sometimes given too much reason to suspect, that the managers have acted upon these principles: but the world must allow, and in their turn every party does allow, and even plead, that there is a wide difference between *abuses in management*, and *the goodness of a social constitution*. One familiar and striking instance, which is an example and proof of this remark, must satisfy every sincere friend to revolution principles. We glory in the wisdom and goodness of the system of our civil legislature; it supports the honour, and limits the power, of the crown; while it secures the liberty, and curbs the licentiousness of the people. The free election of representatives to act in the name of the people, in making every law which can affect life,

liberty, or property, is the happy means of accomplishing this noble purpose: but is it not matter of honest grief to every friend to his king and country, that these elections are managed with shocking perjury and corruption? Nevertheless the patriotic sentiments of every worthy member of the commonwealth, which dictate the utmost abhorrence and contempt of every villain, who dares to affront God, and abuse men in that manner, at the same time inspires the generous breast with firmer zeal for that perverted constitution. Make proper allowances, and you will find even less weight in the objection which I am considering against church-fellowship, than there would be in these instances of mismanagement, to justify a dissent from our excellent civil constitution. Pictures are always supposed to represent some originals: therefore when we see men turning the interests and managements of the church into a system of corruption and self, and at the same time disclaiming every thing of the kind, we have reason to conclude, there is, without doubt, a disinterested church, which acts upon worthy and upright principles.

3. The last objection I am to consider, represents church-fellowship as a *pernicious* scheme. We are told, this system is inconsistent with free enquiry, the public safety, and social virtue. The language betrays the temper of the men who use it. An enemy sure, and none else can use such expressions. The words are bitter: our only comfort arises from the fullest evidences, and deepest conviction, that they are false. That our light may shine before men, and that they may be ashamed who falsely accuse our good conversation, I beg leave to shew, that the system of church-communion for which we plead, is not only consistent with, but eminently assisting to, free enquiry, the public safety, and social virtue.

It is fully consistent with, nay, urges on to, *free enquiry*, as in the example of the Christians at Berea, Acts xvii. 11; and greatly promotes a solid and extensive knowledge of religion, while it is a check upon these misapprehensions which occur, and pass without due enquiry, in our first solitary thoughts. It contributes to a free and full discussion of what is deep or doubtful, Acts xv.

Our

Our fellowship is fully consistent with the *public safety*, and even an additional security for it. It is one article of our communion, as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men; to be in subjection to civil superiors, for conscience sake; to love our enemies; to do good to all men; and to owe no man any thing, but to love one another.

Our communion in church-order is very friendly to *social virtue*, which is never displayed in its native lustre, and amiable charms, with so much advantage, as in religious fellowship, Col. iii. 12. I could insist on these stale objections at more length; and not only make it evident, that they are *unjust*, as they are laid against the communion of saints in church-fellowship; but may be successfully used *against* our opponents, if more important business did not require our attention. And by these presents I depute the excellent Mr. *Dunlop*, to supply my lack of service. The reader may consult his preface to the Westminster Confession of Faith, throughout; particularly the second part of it.

S E C T. V.

The fifth head leads me to mention some plain and proper rules for the conduct of Christians in church-fellowship, that they may more effectually obtain the grand designs of their happy union.

I shall in the first place, put you in mind of that fundamental, and most important advice, John xv. 4. 'Abide in me, and I in you.' Christ is the centre of all gracious and comfortable union among saints. They grow up into him in all things, who is their Head. The more they depend on, and resemble the Head, the more they will and must unite with his members. The reason is obvious: the Spirit of the Head is in all his members, and is a Spirit of love in each towards all. The image of Christ stamped on the soul, is the first object of the saints esteem and delight; and therefore these that abide in him by a deep-rooted and realizing belief of his word, are purified in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, to love one another with a pure heart fervently. To cleave to Christ, as a root and source of perpetual supplies, by a lively faith of divine truths, is a capital point in the communion

of saints: nothing has more influence to produce and maintain such a vigorous, affectionate, and judicious conduct, as their religious connections and obligations demand.

I beg leave, moreover, to put Christians in remembrance of three weighty circumstances, which have the strongest tendency to promote the welfare and comfort of Christian fellowship, *viz.* That all the members take strict heed to their *principles, tempers, and conduct.*

1. Let Christians take heed to their *principles*, and consent to wholesome words only, even the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine which is according to godliness, holding fast the form of sound words in faith and love. Endeavour to obtain clear apprehensions, a firm belief, and sound significant expressions of the doctrine of Christ. Remember how you have received and heard from the lively oracles of God, and hold fast what the Holy Ghost teacheth on the following topics, and others connected with them: *viz.* the differences there are between the covenants of works and grace, and their respective heads; and the various dispensations of the covenant of grace: the fall of all mankind under their first public head, with the guiltiness and depravity, impotence and misery of their fallen state; and the eternal counsel of God's wisdom and will, about the recovery of a remnant of them, under Christ the second Adam, according to the election of grace, through the redemption that is in him, and by the effectual application of the holy Spirit, in the way, and by the means of God's appointment, that no flesh might glory in his presence, but that he who glorieth, may glory in the Lord: the divine and æconomical glories of the three adorable persons in the unity of the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: the good will of God to men, in proposing Christ to the acceptance of all sorts of sinners, that through faith in the record which God hath given us, as disobedient, guilty, and perishing sinners, we may be made partakers of Christ, heirs of God, and blessed with all spiritual blessings; the nature and the necessity of regeneration, through the incorruptible seed of God's word abiding in the soul: the nature, use, and efficacy of evangelical faith, which receives and rests upon
Jesus

Jesus Christ, his person as God-man, and his offices of a prophet, Priest, and King, as Mediator, as he is freely offered in the gospel: the doctrines of repentance toward God, and new obedience in heart and life; of justification by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them that believe; of sanctification by his Spirit, in obeying the truth; and of perseverance in grace and holiness; together with all Christian privileges and duties, that shall issue in the final salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory: and the powerful, necessary, and natural influence, that the glorious and distinguishing peculiarities of the gospel have upon moral duties, in their boundless extent, as referring to God and the creature.

Corrupt and erroneous principles are exceeding dangerous; they eat, as doth a gangrene; they subvert the faith, and destroy the comfort of the church. But, ye beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; upon the foundation, which is laid in the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; upon this foundation build not wood, hay, and stubble, but gold, silver, and precious stones, a sound and lively faith, a judicious, prudent, and animated zeal, and an increasing, persevering, conformity, in heart and life, to the will of God. As new-born babes desire the *sincere* milk of the word, which is pure, without adulterating mixtures of human invention. Hold fast the faithful word, and walk in the truth. Hold forth the word of life to your fellow-Christians, and to a dark and sinful world, as the urn holds forth its lamp, or the light-house its beaming and salutary blaze to the mariner benighted and bewildered upon the trackless and perilous ocean. Ye are the light of the world, especially in the soundness of your faith: abide in the light, and seriously ponder these most important words, 1 John i. 5. 6, 7. 'This is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP ONE WITH ANOTHER.'

2. Another direction for improving Christian fellowship in
the

the most useful manner, is this, that the members should take heed to their *tempers*. Though we should have the clearest notions, and should seem to be most fully persuaded of the divine original and authority of the scriptures; yet if our faith be a mere speculation in the head, without forming the inward temper of our souls, it will neither be honourable to God, nor advantageous to ourselves. It is therefore a matter of the last consequence to us all, to possess and exercise a Christian temper, both towards God and towards men. The social temper I would recommend, is drawn out with the most amiable and sublime colourings, in that beautiful description of it, 1 Cor. xiii. 4.—8. I know not how to express the meaning of it, so well, as in the words of that valuable paraphrast, Dr. Guise, so often referred to already. He gives the sense in the following manner:

“ True Christian love is a most amiable, generous, and operative grace; it endures injuries, affronts, and provocations, with great patience and long-suffering; passes them by, and bears with them, instead of allowing wrathful passions to rise, and boil, and vent themselves in severe resentments; and it is courteous, affable, and beneficent, ready on all occasions to do good: love does not grieve or grudge at the prosperity of others, or envy them the riches, honours, or any excellent qualities, whether of a civil or religious nature, that they enjoy: love doth not behave with insolence, contempt, and scorn, toward persons of inferior rank and attainments; nor act rashly, or perversely, to the disadvantage of others: nor doth it fill a man with high and proud conceits of himself, of his own gifts, or parts, graces, or worldly emoluments; but, in honour, prefers others to himself; and in humbleness of mind esteems others better than himself: it doth not act out of character, unsuitable to one’s station, age, or business; doth nothing that is unbecoming the man or the Christian; or that is indecent, base, and vile in itself, or in the account of the wise and sober part of mankind: it is not so selfish, as to aim at, or pursue any private personal benefit, to the detriment, or neglect of others, or of the public welfare; nor doth it inordinately seek after riches, honour, or pleasure, reputation,

tion, and applause, at the expence of others: it is not soon
 exasperated, and thrown into a furious passion, that renders
 railing for railing; nor is apt to be angry without a cause;
 nor to carry resentments beyond due bounds, either as to the
 degree, or the continuance of them: nor is it ready to suspect
 evil of others; or to put the worst construction upon their
 conduct; much less doth it *seek* to find faults, and charge them
 by mere conjectures, and strained inferences; or to aggravate
 what may be amiss, or meditate mischief of any kind. Chris-
 tian love takes no pleasure in doing any false or unrighteous
 thing itself, or in seeing it done by others; but grieves at
 their sins and failures, and rejoices in their just and regular de-
 portment, and in its own sincere and faithful behaviour, to-
 wards all it has to do with; and it delights to see the truth of
 the gospel, and real, vital, practical religion, prevail in our-
 selves and others; it covers the faults of others, as much as
 may be consistent with duty; bears with their infirmities;
 and suffers many injuries, rather than retaliate them: it is
 much inclined to believe every good thing it hears of others,
 as far as there is any manner of ground for it, and will believe
 well of all its friends and acquaintance, and even of its ene-
 mies, till it has convincing reasons to the contrary: and, when
 things look suspicious, it hopes the best, as long as it can, and
 does not easily give up a case as desperate, when it appears to
 be very bad; but is willing to think, that in due time, through
 the grace of God, it may be mended: and it continues firm,
 and patient, and maintains a noble fortitude of soul, under all
 the hardships and ill usage it meets with.—This excellent grace
 of love is, furthermore, of an abiding nature; it is of per-
 petual use in all circumstances of this life, and is never utterly
 lost out of the heart, that is once truly seasoned with it; nor
 will it die with us, or be needless in the heavenly world; we
 shall carry it thither, where it will subsist, and reign, and be
 perfected in all its lustre and glory for ever."

How happy must that Christian society be, where such a tem-
 per is prevalent among the members! But, alas! how exceeding
 rare is this precious jewel in our degenerate times, when iniquity
 abounds,

abounds, and the love of many has waxed cold ! How literally are the words of the Holy Ghost fulfilled ; ‘ Men shall be lovers of ‘ their own selves, covetous, proud, boasters, fierce, despisers of ‘ those that are good, heady, high-minded !’ What comfort can be expected in a society, where that is the temper of the members that compose it ? But even in such an evil day, the prudent Christian, who is under the power of the happy temper which the apostle describes to the Corinthians, referred to above, is most likely to possess his soul in peace and comfort.

3. The last direction, I shall mention, for the useful and comfortable fellowship of saints, is, that they should take heed to their *conversation*. We should earnestly endeavour, that our conversation among men, especially towards the saints, answer our Christian character and church-state, and that it be suitable to the directions, and ornamental to the principles, privileges, and obligations, and to our holy profession of the gospel of Christ, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ. I shall sum up all that is further necessary on this head, in the words of Paul to the Philippians, chap. iv. and the 8th verse, ‘ Finally, ‘ brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, ‘ whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good ‘ report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think ‘ on these things.’ What is true and sincere in words and actions, professions and engagements, and agreeable to the word of truth, without any hypocrisy and deceit : what is venerable, decent, and becoming, in dress, language, and deportment, according to our respective stations, as men and Christians : what is just and due to God and men, in all our dealings with him and them : what belongs to chastity and purity of mind, free from every defilement of sin, in thought, speech, and behaviour : what is of an amiable nature, and renders the subjects and practisers of it lovely in the eyes of God and man : what is deemed reputable, especially by the sober, wise, and religious part of mankind : all these ought to dwell habitually upon our minds. Often should we reflect upon them, and study their nature, obligation, and importance, in order to our putting them into practice,

tice, upon Christian principles, by divine assistance, to the glory of God, and the credit of our holy profession of Christ's name, and to our own and other's good. Here is a noble field for generous ambition, that becometh saints. 'Let every one of us 'please his neighbour for his good to edification.' Now the God of patience and consolation grant Christians in holy communion, to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus ! Amen, and Amen.

S E C T. VI.

I shall finish this part of my work on the communion of church-members, when I have added a few thoughts on the sixth and last head, which was, to urge the diligent cultivation of social fellowship upon the people of God, by some close and weighty considerations. I have partly prevented myself on this point, by what is said already, and yet much remains to be said still, on so copious a subject. I might be much bold in Christ, Christian reader, to enjoin thee that which is convenient ; yet, for love's sake, I rather beseech thee, as one equally concerned in the privileges, duties, and comforts of this communion with thyself. I beseech you in the bowels of Jesus Christ, by the comforts of his love, and the fellowship of his Spirit, that with one heart, and one mouth, and united endeavours, you join yourselves to the Lord, by taking hold of his covenant, and to his church in holy communion by the will of God ; and that being joined in both, you walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of his holy Spirit. Consider,

1. You cannot be without social connections of some kind. It was not good, even for innocent Adam, to be alone. Enemies to society are rebels against instinct, as well as reason. You have talents and dispositions to receive and communicate social satisfactions : how can you answer to your consciences now ; how will you answer to God hereafter ; if you, like the wicked and slothful servant, thyself the very man, hide your Lord's talent in the earth ? But if you spend it to his dishonour, how deeply provoking is the vile affront ? The only means of preventing both, is to become, and continue, a companion of all them that fear God.

2. The persons you are called to give up yourselves to close and persevering fellowship with, are the friends of God, and therefore you should make them your friends. 'Thine own, and thy father's friend forsake not,' is the wise advice of Solomon, Prov. xxvii. 10. Would you not respect one that had been your father's friend, and whom your parents valued and loved? And how much more should you love and value the friends of God your heavenly Father, who made you, maintains you, and will eternally save you! Can you be at a loss to know their character, while it is testified of them, in the volume of God's book, that they are the most excellent ones of the earth, and of them the world is not worthy; they are nobly born, and nobly related, being the children of God, the heirs of Heaven, the spouse and members of Christ? Should not the friends of God be our companions? Tremble, O my soul, at the thought of turning aside to the flocks of his companions, instead of going forth by the footsteps, and in the company of the flocks of my Beloved.

3. The approved example of the saints in all ages, strongly urge my plea. We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, that agree in one, to assure us, this has always been the practice of the saints. Can you, my dear friends, affect to indulge a criminal and dangerous singularity? or dare you say in your heart, their precision was absurd, and their honest zeal extravagant folly? Rather, conform to their excellent example; and become followers of them, as they were of Christ.

4. The church of the first-born are the persons you would wish to be with for ever; and therefore you should associate with them now in the strictest fellowship. Do not you desire to be with the people of God for ever? to die the death of the righteous, to be numbered with the friends of God, and to have your lot with them in heaven? And who are so proper then to be your companions in this world, as those whom you desire to be with for ever? When you enter into holy connections with the saints, you form an acquaintance and friendship for heaven: nor can I doubt, but that such of God's people as have taken sweet counsel together in this their state of mortality, will have
some

some peculiar pleasure in their meeting in the other world. I beseech you, by all your hopes, and by all your wishes, to cultivate this holy communion with the churches of Christ.

5, That I may not be tedious, allow me to urge another consideration of infinite moment, and so to conclude. By holy union and society with the saints, you will glorify your heavenly Father, your gracious Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost. This is life eternal, to know the only true God, Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and the Holy Ghost that proceedeth from the Father and the Son. And how earnestly doth Christ pray, that the faith of this doctrine may shew itself in the closest union of his disciples among themselves! John xvii. 11. 21. 22. 23. ‘Holy Father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are: that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee: that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them: that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.’

How forcible, irresistibly forcible, are these right words! May God, in sovereign mercy, unite his people in the sacred bonds of truth, love, and holiness; that in a church-state they may look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners!

FINIS.

BRITISH
14 JY 74
MUSEUM

